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TOWARD A MYTH OF COMMUNITY:
STYLE AND STRUCTURE IN
JAMES REANEY'S TRILOGY, THE DONNELLYS

by

©

SUSAN FELICITY MINSOS

A THESIS

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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Submitted by Susan Felicity Minsos in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Diane E Bessai
Supervisor

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Date: October 6

DEDICATION

To Ove, Jennifer, Gillian, Clark and Christopher, my parents, Bill and Gertrude Williams, and Sally Pardee.

ABSTRACT

For the purpose of judging all aspects of literary quality in any given work--in this case, James Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys--the practical critic must distinguish betwen artistic principles (matters of taste and opinion) and critical principles (matters subject to evaluation). Many of Reaney's critics, by failing to take into account the mechanics or the "how" of writing a drama for the stage and by concentrating only on the "what" or the content, have simply been seduced by Reaney's own archetypal pre-occupations. These critics argue exhaustively about the meaning of the content; many have nothing constructive to offer regarding the form of Reaney's plays. Only recently, in fact, have the formal concerns of structure and style in drama come under the scrutiny of a few discerning critics. Indeed, Reaney himself, when he assumes the hat of critic, also focuses on the mythopeic rather than the formal quality of the work. Consequently, he too overlooks the critical question of whether or not the form of literature (other than his own) is an organic expression of content and theme.

For the critic who deals with formal concerns, analysis of The Donnellys is most readily accessible by dividing form into two areas which are the following:

structure and style. Since the dramatic structure is concerned with a planned series of events, Reaney's gyroscopic arrangement of the story of the Donnellys represents an exploitation of various dramatic conventions (Aeschylean trilogy, Greek chorus and epic theatre) for the purpose of making a thematic statement. The style makes a thematic statement, as well, by determining the manner in which the events are presented. Using props as instruments of stage metaphor, music (especially the ballad form), language, plus generic styles (melodrama and docudrama), Reaney expands and reinforces the gyroscopic structure of The Donnellys at the same time as he underlines the meaning of the archetypes intrinsic in the work.

The dramatic form of the trilogy--its structure and its style--functions as an expression of Reaney's creation of a self-conscious myth of community. Formal evaluation, plus consideration of some of the archetypes upon which Reaney draws, combine to allow a complete analysis of The Donnellys according to the tenets of practical criticism. This study is now adequately prepared to judge the literary richness and quality of Reaney's trilogy. Therefore, by calling on stylistic and structural evidence as support for the complexity and success of the drama, analysis shows that Reaney's trilogy may be appreciated by persons of several philosophical points-of-view, not only those who are archetypists.

Preface

This study examines James Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys, according to the tenets of practical criticism. It presents an analysis of the style and structure of the three plays for the purpose of identifying and evaluating their achievement as mythopeic dramatic literature.

The examination begins by establishing my critical method that distinguishes between artistic and critical principles, the one the province of the writer, the other the province of the evaluative critic. In this context a selection of recent Reaney critics are analyzed with a special focus on those who concentrate on themes and archetypes (that is, the artistic principles of the playwright) at the expense of formal concerns. Reaney's own critical habit of airing his artistic principles in lieu of formal analysis concludes this introductory phase of the study.

The body of the thesis first concentrates on analysis of structure and secondly on analysis of style. On the matter of structure, Reaney's use of several established dramatic conventions is discussed (for example, chorus, trilogy-format, episodic-patterns). On the matter of style, both theatrical and literary features are scrutinized (for example, stage metaphor, ballad conventions, docudramatic and melodramatic genres). While both categories of analysis are ultimately focused on the archetypal themes and mythic dimensions that characterize Reaney's vision, formal analysis is offered as an essential prelude to final critical judgment. This examination, therefore, concludes with comment on the nature and quality of Reaney's community myth-making, comment derived from the foregoing analysis.

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My gratitude and thanks go to the many persons without whose help I could never have attempted, let alone completed, this thesis. My husband, Ove, and all of my immediate and extended family, appropriately encouraged me, pushed me, or left me alone as the occasion warranted. My supervisor, Professor Diane E. Bessai, herself very much an authority on James Reaney's plays as well as Canadian drama in general, was always approachable, helpful and interested. Professor James Nelson spent several hours helping me improve and clarify my arguments. Sylvia Berg kindly proof-read the penultimate revision. And, as the saying goes, last but not least, thanks to Connie Baker who with patience, willingness and skill, typed this thesis.

CONTENTS

Chapter Page

1 Critical Stance and Summary of Criticism...............1
  I. Introduction.....................................1
  II. The Function of the Practical Critic............1
  III. A Summary of Criticism........................11
  IV. Archetypal Criticism...........................28

2 Structure...36
  I. Introduction....................................36
  II. Dramatic and Emotional Structures..............38
  III. The Chorus.....................................54
  IV. Structure and Myth.............................75

3 Style...91
  I. Introduction....................................91
  II. Dramatic Style: theatrical and literary........92
  III. Style and Myth................................129

4 Summary..141
  I. Introduction...................................141
  II. Structure and Style...........................142
  III. Conscious Myth-making........................146

* * *

Bibliography...156

1

Critical Stance and Summary of Criticism

I. Introduction

The thrust of this chapter is directed basically at three aspects of criticism which pertain either directly or indirectly to James Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys. Briefly, the three areas may be described in the following manner: the first is an outline of the precepts of practical (rather than theoretical) criticism, emphasizing the need for the practical critic to analyze form (structure and style) as well content; the second looks summarily at the critical material which has been written about Reaney's drama, especially, The Donnellys; the third takes the position that the seductive nature of archetypal criticism (as illustrated by Reaney's own critical writing) tends to produce a rather narrow, self-serving analysis of literature because the criticism is motivated by the same creative principles as the literature.

II. The Function of the Practical Critic

With the exception of two or three published books, generally written on his early poetry and drama, most criticism of James Crerar Reaney's The Donnelly Trilogy exists in essays and articles which have appeared at random in a variety of Canadian journals over the past six or seven years. Because of the sporadic nature of periodical criticism, both casual readers as well as the student of Reaney's work often find that the critical or theoretical understructure of the essayist-critics who write these articles is difficult to ascertain. However excusable, this ad hoc situation is unfortunate. It is unfortunate because not only does a critic's statement of position help the critic to organize his own thinking but it also guides the student in determining the value of a particular piece in regard to his own field of study. For example, many articles purporting to be a discussion about the structure of a Reaney play end up by waxing eloquently on mythopeic themes without explaining why, how, or if, content and structure are related.[1] To avoid confusion, and even sometimes disappointment, the critic should ensure that his commentary is based on a pre-defined critical position.[2] Thus, even if his hypothesis turn out to be untenable for some persons[3], at least the resulting analysis can and should be consistent and maybe even helpful when viewed under its own terms. It is safe, but alas not very honest, when a critic assumes the same prerogatives as the artist and expects his point-of-view will be ferreted out by other critics. Accordingly, before attempting to evaluate the quality and nature of some of the criticism written about The Donnelly Trilogy, I will have to set forth my critical position by making a declaration of criteria. Adherence to the following criteria produces a position which will colour my response to Reaney the playwright. The practical criticism which I intend to outline, a position which includes consideration of structure and style as well as an interest in an historical perspective, will both affect and effect my judgment on the work of critics who have written about Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys.

---

[1] See Ross G. Woodman, James Reaney, Canadian Writers number 12, New Canadian Library (Montreal and Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), in the chapter "Art and Life", p. 47. (This reference will be further expanded in a discussion on specific critics.)

---

[2] Critical position does not have to be religiously published with each article or essay. Nor does the position have to be idiosyncratic as there are many "schools" of criticism. Basically, a critical position separates the practical critic from a mere reviewer.

[3] An historian may not find a thematic approach to literature useful, but he could hardly dispute another critic's interest in theme.

A practical critic has to study two maps. Unlike an artist whose major concern is only with his work, a critic must know what constitutes good art; and, he must know what constitutes good criticism. Therefore, why not separate the domain of the artist from the domain of the practical critic (allowing of course, that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive)? The concerns of the first area can be loosely designated as "artistic principles"; concerns of the second area then become "critical principles". Failure to appreciate the difference between critical and artistic principles provides the first major pitfall for the practical critic.

The pitfall occurs because artistic principles, often in the guise of critical principles, are frequently presented as having been formulated and written by the artists themselves. These books of "criticism", pretending to theorize on the state of criticism, are more often than not an artist's manifesto on "how to read my work".[4] The material can be a good source of insight as long as it is recognized for what it is. However, some of these manifestos which explain how to "better" read an artist's work are written not by artists but by critical theorists. The most famous Canadian exponent of artistic principle is Northrop Frye.[5] His theories on mythopeic modes are essentially more helpful to artists than they are to critics; and, his Anatomy of Criticism--despite the title--more properly may be considered to supply "artistic" instead of "critical" tools. This claim is made because artistic principles appear to be concepts which relate to "what" (theme and content) is being said rather than to the mechanics or to the "how" (form) of saying. Artistic principles involve those subjects which arise from a particular study: history, sociology, psychology, economics, philosophy, mythology. Artistic principles seem to emanate accordingly from the belief or from the idealogy which motivates the art; therefore, those matters which relate to theme or content will be called, for the purposes of this paper, artistic rather than critical.

---

[4] Margaret Atwood's Survival, D. G. Jones' Butterfly on Rock, George Bowering's, "Metaphysic in Time: The Poetry of Lionel Kearns" seem to fall in this category. Lest this claim about the artist's manifesto sound too dismissive, I should hasten to add that a critic should neither be overwhelmed by nor ignore these analyses.

---

[5] Any theory, including structuralism, or post-structuralism, which attempts to explain literature (or tries to improve literature by demonstrating that a novel is written according to certain linguistic concepts), is here designated as "artistic". These theories, while hoping to explain why classical and modern masterpieces are great works, cannot distinguish (are not equipped to distinguish) between the great and the mediocre. Similarly, while every artist presumably would be great if he could be, not every artist is great. Critical principles provide the tools to distinguish and evaluate all art whether it is romantic, formulistic or mythopeic.

Artistic principles are equitable and apply to all genres or structures. Psychology, history or myth can turn up with equal force and validity in poetry, drama or novels. Because there no longer seems to be a right or wrong subject in literature, identification of artistic principles in a work gives rise to subjective words such as "authentic" or "genuine." A critic may say, "yes, history was like that[6] (or, no it was not)," or he may say, "yes, some people are like that[7] (or, no they are not)."[8] Very often artistic principles are difficult to evaluate (rarely can a critic say that a particular poet should not write about history or about mythology); therefore, critics when writing about themes tend to treat content as something to be explained or paraphrased instead of assessed. Nevertheless, the critic is well within his field of expertise when he identifies and explains (even paraphrases) content and theme in a poem, novel or play.

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[6] e.g., authentic.

[7] e.g., genuine.

[8] "Authentic" and "genuine" seem to be words of "feeling". These words connote "fact" only when they are used in conjunction with textbooks on history or psychology or works of evidence extraneous to the literature in question.

If, however, the critic feels his job is finished after he has discussed artistic principles (those things which constitute the "what" or the content of literature), he is in danger of failing to meet the needs of good practical criticism even though he may intuitively recognize good art. Essentially therefore, criticism must be able to make judgments.

Practical criticism explains and evaluates artistic principles (theme and/or content) by explicating style and form. Consequently, while a critic may think it pretentious to denigrate a novelist for tackling, say, the ramifications of a specific sociological phenomenon, the critic may point out after enucleating style and form from theme why the content is not handled well or adequately. Moreover, analysis of style and form should serve as support for a critic's argument regarding the artistic principles in a work. For example, because a playwright repeats a concrete image throughout his play (a matter of style), that image takes on a greater than usual significance; noting such significance enriches the meaning of the work as well as proves the position of that critic who is actively seeking a definitive thematic interpretation.

The practical critic may worry about confronting a greater problem with theorists when he tries to defend an analysis of genre or form as something which exists in itself. The difficulty is a semantic one involving the question of whether or not genre is a proper term and therefore a proper object of study. It seems ludicrous for the practical critic to be backed into a corner by proponents of "organic form". Theorists from Coleridge to Croce would like to force their followers into denying the existence of sonnet, ballad, epic forms on the basis that "good" poems grow like flowers.[9] Nevertheless, the theory of "organic form", just like all artistic principles, has a tendency to become outmoded. The rigid sonneteer is entitled to as much respect for his artistic principles as the romantic lyricist. If one poem is superior to another, the proof of superiority should be based on more than the neo-classic or romantic idea of good taste and decorum.

The transcience or fashionableness of critical theorist schools brings out the most persuasive argument in support of defining the difference between critical and artistic principles. Canadian critics, especially, should learn to appreciate the difference between art and criticism because literature in this country has traditionally been accused of so many "new beginnings".[10] Poets (writers) of the past are continually the object of critical and public abuse, dismissal and re-evaluation. Often the abuse is based on false grounds. In other words, some poetry has been struck temporarily from the canon because critics have quarrelled with the artistic principles inherent in the poetry not because critics have identified some of the poem's stylistic flaws or failure of expression.[11] So rapidly is this fashion-parade of artistic principles changing that some literature is being dismissed even before it has been abused. This nearly frantic assessment and re-assessment keeps both the insecure poet and the critical theorist scrambling to keep up with the latest trends.

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[9] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "on the Principles of Genial Criticism concerning the Fine Arts," in Criticism: The Major Texts ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt, Bruce and World Inc. 1952) , pp. 364-375.

Perhaps trends occur because society places so much value on originality--sometimes at the expense of excellence. Even so, artistic principles (all that emanates from the theoretic schools of criticism) serve a valid philosophical function for the artist and the practical critic. For the time being one must put aside the huge question of how exactly the artist influences and is influenced by critical theory. Criticism-as-catalyst is a matter of endless speculation. However, the practical critic should be wary of theory. Thus, while recognizing the influence of something as complex as thematic study on art, the critic should use such prescriptive theory as only one of a series of tools that will facilitate careful and extensive analysis of literature. The importance of criticism lies in its ability to be comprehensive. The critic should constantly be aware that the purpose of practical criticism is not only to determine "what" is being said and "how" but also to recognize and assess masterpieces even though they be contemporary. Seduced by Reaney's interesting artistic principles, many critics have overlooked the form of Reaney's drama. There are, however, hopeful signs that trends are changing. Some recent articles on Reaney examine form as well as content. Not to be outdone, James Reaney has said some illuminating things about his own work and made some perceptive comments on the work of other poets and dramatists; however, the interesting asides made by Reaney-as-critic will be considered following a categorical assessment of what others say about The Donnelly Trilogy and remarks about general criticism on his drama.[12]

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[10] Alfred Bailey, John Sutherland, A. J. M. Smith, to name a few, at one time or another have extoled "new beginnings" instead of a Canadian tradition. Their opinions appear to be based on theme alone.

[11] I think Archibald Lampman's poetry suffered for a while because critics did not care for Lampman's artistic (transcendental) principles; and, therefore, these same critics did not bother either to analyze Lampman's transcendalism or his poetic style. The poetry of Reaney is in danger of suffering a similar fate because Northrop Frye's theories are now under fire.

III. A Summary of Criticism

There are three literary biographies of James Reaney: James Reaney by Alvin Lee, James Reaney by Ross G. Woodman, and Profiles in Canadian Drama: James Reaney by J. Stewart Reaney.[13] All three texts are basically thematic or interpretive studies. In his book on Reaney, Alvin Lee clearly indicates that he is writing a descriptive literary biography. Using his preface to declare himself, Lee states, "My purpose has been to describe and interpret Reaney's literary achievements so far."[14] However much one may dispute the value of his avowed intention, within his own guidelines, Lee offers a useful consideration of theme and content in Reaney's early plays.

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[12] In selecting representative essays on Reaney, I have tried to choose examples of different critical approaches. Sometimes it is impossible to evaluate the quality of the criticism because of constraint placed on the writer regarding anthology or magazine space.

[13] Alvin Lee, James Reaney (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968). Ross G. Woodman, James Reaney (Montreal and Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971). J. Stewart Reaney, James Reaney, Profiles in Canadian Drama, gen. ed. Geraldine Anthony (Gage Educational Publishing Ltd., 1977).

Despite the general high quality of the book, occasionally Mr. Lee makes assertions that overstate the facts. In the chapter entitled "Earth in the Arms of the Sun", the author refers to some of Reaney's worries about structure, specifically "literary structure". For Reaney, this dilemma was apparently remedied by a design based on Frye's mythic archetypes. Lee states:

> .....Reaney wrote a master's thesis on the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett which he now dismissess contemptuously as mainly *plot summary*,[15] because he feels he did not at that time know anything about *literary structure*. It is this knowledge which he claims to have gained from Frye....It is true that in his apprentice years he worried about the problem of *structure* a good deal; having written a novel each summer of his undergraduate period, he then abandoned the manuscripts because he felt them to be *structurally weak*. This suggests that it was structure in the sense of a large design which was the problem. When he encountered Frye's principles of archetypal symbolism and typology, he felt himself free to attempt the sustained *pattern* evident

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[14] Lee, preface.

[15] My underlining.

> in the complex [poem] 'a Suit of Nettles'[16]

Most persons easily recognize that a plot line is not just a narrative or a linear unfolding of events. When one relates a mere plot summary, therefore, one gives a description of a carefully organized series of events without telling why the events are planned in a specific way. In other words, the way events are planned or structured in a play, poem or novel makes a thematic statement. Reaney appears to have felt that because of some literary ignorance his scripts were structurally weak. Since a structural weakness implies a weakness in the plot or the foundation upon which the work is based, and since plot by definition includes both design and events, there is a good chance that the weakness which Reaney perceived in his novels was probably rather more mundane (events) than literary (design). It may be somewhat overstating the case for Lee to assume that this weakness disappears when Reaney adapts Frye's "principles of archetypal symbolism" to his work. The observation must be made that while Frye's principles as outlined in Fearful Symmetry and Anatomy of Criticism have had an undeniable influence on Reaney's style, structural difficulties (plot problems) are not solved for Reaney until he "lifts" his narrative thread--his storyline--from history. Reaney's imagination needs the touchstone of real events in order for him to keep his fantasies contained. Quite frankly, the shape of history prevents his iconography from sailing off into totally esoteric realms.[17]

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[16] Lee, p. 123.

These documents which give an account of the lives of the Donnelly family provide Reaney with a coherent reality. Basic realities, when combined with the particular stylistic patterns to which Lee refers, illustrate the mythological themes of The Donnelly Trilogy. Furthermore, Reaney's archetypal symbolism does not radically alter, whether it is applied to poetry or drama. Dramatic structure, even when equipped with the most complex symbols, requires a careful consideration of plot and it was plot for Reaney that proved troublesome. By overestimating the importance of Reaney's artistic principles, Mr. Lee has avoided facing up to the playwright's real concerns about structure. Mr. Lee's continuous exalted appraisal of Reaney's work comes close to what Michael Tait in "The Limits of Innocence" believes critics must not do. Tait declares, "But Canada hasn't many playwrights and we can't afford to bewilder those we have with indifference or contempt, or even panegyrics."[18] By its very nature, a purely thematic assessment of a play does tend to be bewildering at times because practical discussion and judgments seem out of place.

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[17] Lee admits to being bothered in The Killdeer by the way in which "an ostensible naturalism seemed to wrestle uneasily with symbolic meanings." While Lee later modifies his position, Michael Tait, on the other hand, firmly states in "The Limits of Innocence" that the plot of the Killdeer, being too complicated, finally causes the action to "fly irretrievably apart." Tom Marshall in his book, Harsh and Lovely Land, says that Reaney's early plays are no better "than those of Eliot or Auden." Marshall believes that The Donnelly Trilogy is Reaney's "magnificent achievement."

Critical analysis in the 1980's should be fair to those persons who have previously attempted to explain and interpret Reaney. Persons such as Ross Woodman, who wrote his book on Reaney over ten years ago, make their contribution knowing that their work is not definitive. For one thing, Reaney's opus is a growing entity; his new plays are subject to evaluation which may change the colour of the criticism on Reaney as a dramatist. Also, because Woodman's text on Reaney does not include the playwright's major trilogy, the manner in which Woodman handles some aspects of Reaney's growth as a playwright was at that time based on supposition about the artist's potential.

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[18] Michael Tait, "The Limits of Innocence", in Dramatists in Canada (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1972), p. 134.

Woodman's criticism seems to adhere to the same artistic principles that govern Reaney's art. The critic's personal archetypal leanings are best described in his own words when Woodman identified Jungian concepts which he feels are present in Reaney's drama. Woodman explains:

> When the unconscious rises to consciousness, as it inevitably does in Reaney's drama, there is a radical breakthrough, an interpenetration of the human and divine that appears improbable and melodramatic only if the actions of the unconscious in Reaney's carefully constructed imagistic pattern have been missed.[19]

For the uninitiated or for the unbeliever, the conclusions implicit in this statement--conclusions which assume certain properties of the conscious and unconscious--may be less than obvious. Woodman follows through with his archetypal understructure when he differentiates between naturalistic and poetic drama. He says:

> Naturalistic drama depends for its success upon the illusion of an independent consciousness. Poetic drama, on the other hand, deliberately destroys that illusion by bringing in forces above or below consciousness to guide and determine the action.[20]

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[19] Woodman, p. 47

[20] Woodman, p. 48.

Both of the statements quoted above may present critical difficulties. In the first quotation, the phrase "actions of the unconscious" sits rather uncomfortably with the following phrase "carefully constructed imagistic pattern." The word "constructed" appears to indicate a highly rational activity which is very much a characteristic of the conscious mind. Nor can the reader be certain exactly whose unconscious actions should not be "missed". Worse yet, Woodman implies that missing the actions of the unconscious means the humble playgoer will think that some of Reaney's drama is "improbable and melodramatic." In fact, some of Reaney's drama, especially The Killdeer, is indeed improbable and melodramatic. Even when Woodman senses something amiss in Reaney's drama,[21] he explains part of the trouble away by accusing Reaney's audiences of forgetting "their own childhoods" and thus failing to recognize archetypes.[22]

The inconsistencies which appear to be creeping into Professor Woodman's criticism because of his mythopeic idealogy come to full stride in the next quoted statement. His view that "naturalistic drama depends...upon the illusion of an independent consciousness" suggests, correctly perhaps, that in a particular kind of drama, there is no conscious connection between the audience and the players. Players pretend to be truly "in life" and the audience goes along with the pretense. Professor Woodman feels that poetic drama is the antithesis of naturalistic drama. Poetic drama, the reader is told, destroys illusion; therefore, it must follow that any drama which destroys illusion is poetic and, any drama which creates illusion (naturalistic) is not poetic. One simply cannot imagine that this outline is a good definition of the differences between naturalistic and poetic drama. For example, the terms (poetic and naturalistic) do not seem to be exclusive. Naturalistic and anti-illusionary are words that seem to link up diametrically; poetic and prosaic are also ideas that are opposite. Does the "poetic" in poetic drama refer to form or content? Woodman's definition seems to apply to a poetic concept of archetypes (theme) more than to the form--style and structure--of drama.

---

[21] Woodman acknowledges and seems to agree with Michael Tait that Reaney's early plays lack a central focus.

[22] Woodman, p. 48. One supposes that recognizing archetypes is an "unconscious activity"; therefore, whether or not archetypes have been forgotten by the conscious should be immaterial.

The doubts that exist after Professor Woodman contrasts naturalistic and poetic grow greater when he talks about "forces above or below consciousness to guide and determine the action." The notion that humans are victims of forces beyond their control (out of reach of their own consciousness) is one put forth by so-called "naturalists" such as Emile Zola and Thomas Hardy. Confusions abound when the tenets of "naturalism" are used to describe something which is not naturalistic but poetic.

Part of the confusion here arises because the dramatic form is rarely considered a proper subject of study. Perhaps one should add, in fact, that dramatic form is rarely considered at all by Canadian critics. Thus, since the above definitions do not appear to be truly satisfactory, their perpetration by others is unfortunate. In her article, "James Reaney and The Tradition of Poetic Drama", Mary Barr quotes Ross Woodman on the nature of poetic drama and she proceeds, much in the same manner as her mentor, to discuss the themes of good and evil in The Killdeer and says nothing about the structure of poetic drama.[23] What she believes to be the salient factor in the Woodman assertion (and that is, "the forces above and below consciousness") she calls the forces of good and evil. Good and evil are not the exclusive properties of any form let alone so-called poetic drama. Moreover, the suggestion that good and evil are "unconscious forces" in The Killdeer very much ignores their blatant nature in this play. Just as Ross Woodman does, so Mary Barr in her article gives a thematic interpretation of Reaney's plays; like the aforementioned definitions given by Professor Woodman, some of her assumptions eschew rigorous examination.

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[23] Mary Barr, "James Reaney and the Tradition of Poetic Drama" (Canadian Drama, 2:1 [Spring 1976, 78-89]).

The last of the three longer texts was written by James Reaney's son. J. Stewart Reaney, although himself very much interested in themes and archetypes, writes (in a chapter on "The Donnellys") clearly and helpfully concerning the dramatic technique in Sticks and Stones, the first play in the trilogy. He states that action in this play is divided into four categories: those events concerning the seasonal life in Biddulph; those events which concern the spiritual lives of the inhabitants; those matters which concern the legal and the geometric.[24] Nothing could be more helpful for a first-time viewer of Sticks and Stones than to know this structuring plan. When the playgoer understands this plot design, although the incidents are numerous and the pace is quick, he knows each event will have a bearing on one or more of the four broad categories. Reaney's plays are complex both in theme and in form; however, a relatively simple outline allows a playgoer to arrive at Sticks and Stones armed with a chart useful for remembering details. Eugene Benson, who reviewed James Reaney, agrees that the son of the playwright has written "a very good book."

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[24] J. Stewart Reaney, p. 63.

Nevertheless, the praise is given with reservations. Deploring the lack of the critical context and the lack of evaluative tools (in a relative sense), Benson notes:

> Archetypal critics, though, are inclined to abstain from such evaluation on the ground that evaluation has to do with the history of taste rather than with systematic criticism.[25]

Benson is quite correct. Alvin Lee, Ross Woodman and finally J. Stewart Reaney are archetypal critics happily engaged in analyzing the themes of a very gifted mythopeic writer. How well their analyses would apply to literature that does not adhere to similar artistic principles remains an unanswered question.

Not only are the three longer works on Reaney basically thematic studies done by archetypal critics, but also several essays which have appeared in literary and dramatic periodicals have followed the same tactic. Julia Schneider mentions Reaney's "highly personal use of the dramatic form" in the last sentence of her opening statement in "Negative and Positive Elements in James Reaney's Plays."[26] Unfortunately, the first time she mentions dramatic form is the last and the rest of Schneider's article is an analysis of symbolism. On a more positive note, one article by Eric Roberts entitled, "Sticks and Stones: History, Play and Myth," analyzes the "authentic" aspect of the trilogy's content by referring to Orlo Miller's book, The Donnellys Must Die and Thomas Kelley's book, The Black Donnellys.[27] Roberts points out areas where Reaney is consciously documenting history and areas where Reaney alters fact for "dramatic truth". Roberts evaluates this style of fact-changing and finds it a necessary device in order to create sympathy for the Donnellys. James Noonan's introduction to Sticks and Stones (an introduction to the whole trilogy really), is a survey of praise (expressed after the play's productions) as well as a general outline of content. Space limitations prevent him from actually following up on some of his own provocative statements, and indeed he does make enticing generalizations. At one point Noonan declares:

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[25] Eugene Benson, "James Stewart Reaney: James C. Reaney", in "Reviews" Canadian Drama, number 2 (Autumn 1977) p. 211.

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[26] Julia Schneider, Article on Reaney in Canadian Drama (Number, Spring, 1976), p. 98.

[27] Eric Roberts, Article on Reaney in Canadian Drama (Number 2, Fall, 1978), p. 160.

> [Sticks and Stones] is a combination of many things: poetry and prose, realistic action and mime, song and dance, games and ritual, fantasy and dream, past, present and future. The work has been compared to that of such diverse playwrights as Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Brecht, and the Victorian melodramatists.[28]

Analysis of the plays will likely find support for each aspect of Noonan's grand overview. The sweeping and confident manner with which Noonan asserts these claims shows two things: that Noonan believes Reaney's trilogy is a masterpiece; that no one yet has begun to attack much more than the literary surface of Reaney's "Donnellys".

Fortunately, one aspect of the plays' dramatic form has been receiving attention. Reaney's dramatic "style" has been the subject of at least two good papers. And, at last Eugene Benson's desire to see the plays of the trilogy examined in a broader context and not just in their own isolation has been picked up by some critics who have placed Reaney on a Canadian as well as a world stage.[29]

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[28] James Noonan, "Preface", Sticks and Stones by James Reaney (Press Porcepic, 1975), p. 15.

[29] Benson, p. 211.

Gerald Parker describes Reaney as "shaman" and mask-maker who tells a story based on documents and makes the whole theatre experience the actual style of the telling. Like Alvin Lee, Parker is impressed with Reaney's design images which he claims are "rooted in a complex verbal and scenic [sic] handling of documents." Another aspect of theatrical style praised by Parker is Reaney's use of the diction of the newspaper as a basis for a rich theatrical language.[30] Parker does not address the question of how and if newspaper language (newspapers are referred to as social documents) becomes poetic language. However, one is almost relieved that Parker leaves Reaney, the poet, to one side and is interested in Reaney the dramatist without apology. More recently, Parker has written about the melodramatic style of the trilogy. Although he does not define melodrama, nor does he differentiate between melodramatic and tragic defeat (he rather uses both terms interchangably based on Frye's concept of the "sick society"), Parker does draw on dramatic tradition to support his analysis.[31]

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[30] Gerald Parker, "History, Story and Story Style:" James Reaney's The Donnellys; Canadian Drama (Number 2, Fall '78), p. 150 and Gerald Parker, "Melodrama and Tragedy in James Reaney's Donnelly Trilogy," Essays on Canadian Writing (Numbers 24-25, Winter-Spring 1982-83), p. 165.

If Parker, with his traditional dramatic references, sets Reaney's trilogy on a world stage, then Professor Diane Bessai places the playwright in the stream of Canadian dramatic tradition. The dramatic tradition of which Reaney is a part seems to have begun in the very late adolescence of a very late-maturing country. Whether or not the wish to tell our own stories is one inherent feature of Canadian stage-playing, the act of personifying the facts of our own family album has been labelled, docudrama. Professor Bessai points out that neither Paul Thompson nor James Reaney is particularly pleased by having his plays categorized as part of this new, indigenous, "pedantic", genre; however, the so-called documentary aspect of both Sticks and Stones and the drama which has been presented by Theatre Passe Muraille, has been transformed into a readily identifiable style which Diane Bessai describes in her article, "Documentary into Drama: Reaney's Donnelly Trilogy."[32]

Professor Bessai observes that the documentary,

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[31] Essays on Canadian Writing, Winter-Spring, 1982 is a special Reaney edition.

[32] Diane Bessai, "Documentary into Drama: Reaney's Donnelly Trilogy", Essays on Canadian Writing (Numbers 24-25, Winter-Spring 1982-83) p.186.

"anti-illusionist" dramatic form incorporates the "investigatory process itself" into the action of the drama as part of its search for authenticity.[33] Anti-illusionist plays, according to Professor Bessai, become almost parodies of "mimesis" because they mimic rather than imitate reality. In fact, the parody may be carried to the extreme; the key word here is "appearance". Anti-illusionist docudrama, giving the appearance of basing its presentation on "substantiated evidence", creates a style that is the quintessence of illusion. The selection, that is the omission or inclusion, of specific documents is made according to the whimsical principles of "dramatic truth". Dramatic truth is a two-edged sword. For example, Reaney alters facts (documents) for the sake of dramatic truth; yet, intrinsic in Reaney's trilogy is a condemnation of Thomas Kelley for doing exactly the same thing. Therefore, when the term docudrama refers to and is accepted as "style" merely, and not as an attempt at objective reality, the anti-illusory (this-is-true) technique of presentation is necessarily the plays' greatest source of irony.[34]

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[33] Bessai, p. 191.

[34] Professor Bessai has commented on this dimension of Reaney's trilogy. Her observations must apply to all docu-drama whose selective choosing of documents makes as much of a thematic statement as ever occurs in naturalist drama.

Now is a good time to pause in this discussion; perhaps it is possible to perceive a slight shift in the focus of criticism of Reaney, the playwright. The major texts definitely suffer because of their early publication. Since Reaney's themes are so grandly and unabashedly archetypal, critics at first responded by encouraging the artistic principle of the poet and shrugging off the style of the playwright and the structure of the drama. At last excellent, fully-rounded work is being produced on the trilogy. Writers and reviewers, respecting the integrity of the dramatic form, are beginning to analyze Reaney's style in conjunction with the work of other dramatists.[35] Reviewers, once shy about being critical of Reaney's early drama, are beginning to appreciate why The Donnelly Trilogy is the great achievement at which the early plays only hinted.[36] Reaney's plays are not performed nearly as often as they should be; but, the day is coming when there will be Reaney festivals. When that day arrives, knowledgeable people will be waiting to take a better, closer look at the dramatic form and style of the plays, as well as the themes of "Reaneyland". The concluding section of this chapter is concerned with Reaney's critical comments on two poets: Jay MacPherson and Isabella V. Crawford. One of the purposes of such analysis is to show that Reaney's remarks on other writers are often an elaboration of his own philosophy; or, as this was noted before, an explanation of artistic principles. Finally, most importantly, the practical critic should be aware that Reaney is a mythopeic writer. The artistic principles of the man are an important consideration for any critic bent on understanding Reaney's plays. Knowing Reaney's interest in archetypes, the critic can therefore determine, to some extent at least, the nature of the mythology that springs not from the unconscious, but from the very conscious mind.

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[35] Richard Perkyns, "The Innocence of the Donnellys; James Reaney's Three Ring Circus", Canadian Drama (Number 1, Spring, 1977), p. 162, gives an excellent analysis of theme, style and structure in what can be called a fully-rounded critical evaluation of The Donnellys.

[36] Gerald M. MacLean, Review of Sticks and Stones, by James Reaney, Canadian Drama (Number 1, Spring 1976), p. 125.

IV. Archetypal Criticism

The first thing that should be stated is the fact that the critic, Reaney, is a theorist. As a theorist, Reaney believes in the brotherhood of artistic principles and therefore begs the question of criticism by giving sympathetic readings of literature with which he is in sympathy. To this end, the approval he accords both

MacPherson and Crawford emanates from what they are saying rather than how they say it. Furthermore, one suspects that reading Reaney-as-critic is more an exercise in understanding Reaney the artist, than it is one in understanding the poetry of either Crawford or MacPherson. In his essay, "The Third Eye", a review of MacPherson's book, The Boatman, Reaney finds a good springboard for expressing his own views in life and art. Reaney says:

> One clue to the mystery of Miss MacPherson's hold on one's imagination is the feeling she constantly gives of things inside things. This idea of things within things can be expanded into the most satisfying explanation of existence I think I know of.[37]

Reaney believes that the myth of "things within things" is the "essential design" of MacPherson's book. Indeed, Reaney's observation about the artistic principles of the poet is probably very perceptive; but, it is certainly true that the pattern of "things within things" forms a design that Reaney himself uses in his poetry and drama. Even his description of what he believes MacPherson is saying shows the Reaney imagination is always at work. The following is a nice illustration:

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[37] James Reaney, "The Third Eye", (1960), A Choice of Critics selections from Canadian Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 163.

> There the speaker feels only the beginning of an insideness-outsideness which slowly spirals upward into the magnificently final statement of the very last poem where inside and outside disappear forever.[38]

Reaney's archetypal visions sound suspiciously romantic in their terminology. Words such as "feel" and "forever", and the marvelous phrase, "insideness-outsideness", are the expressions of the poet who uses his imagination for the purpose of creating literature, not criticizing it.

One of Reaney's kindred spirits whose reputation was in need of exactly the kind of sensitivity Reaney displays (towards poetry that appeals to him), was Isabella Valancy Crawford. Reaney's intentions are sterling; but sometimes he allows his peculiar philosophy of literature and life to be reflected back on himself when he looks at a Crawford poem. In the introduction to a Crawford anthology, Collected Poems, Reaney relates his version of what he believes to be Crawford's daffodil theory of the break-up of eternity. Before quoting Crawford's (Reaney's) theory, one should have a look at the daffodil which inspires it. The flower appears only once; that "one great daffodil" is an image in "Malcolm's Katie".[39] The daffodil, given in connection with Max's great love for Katie, appears to be like a mandala which symbolizes the completeness of that love. The image is presented in the following way:

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[38] Reaney, p. 163.

[39] Isabella V. Crawford, "Malcolm's Katie",

> For love, once set within a lover's
>   breast,
> Has its own sun, its own peculiar sky,
> All one great daffodil, on which do lie
> The sun, the moon, the stars, all seen
>   at once
> And never setting, but all shining
>   straight
> Into the faces of the trinity -
> The one beloved, the lover, and sweet
>   love.[40]

This passage describes the effect that love has on the one who loves, in this case Max, who "cared little for the blotted sun,/And nothing for the startled, outshone stars." Love forms its own universe which is eternal ("and never setting"); love also makes its own trinity. Moreover, this love is not the love of a supernatural being for humankind but exactly the reverse. Here, two lovers create their "own peculiar sky", or a supernatural existence which rivals then overcomes the real world. The use of the word "trinity" to describe the three aspects of love--"beloved", "lover" and "sweet love"--which become united into one

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Collected Poems (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 193.

[40] Crawford, p. 203.

force, implicitly refers to an allegorical interpretation of sexual union. This romantic eroticism, all the more erotic because it is romantic, is very characteristic of Crawford's style.[41]

Although the daffodil theory expounded by Reaney is too long to be quoted here, some remarks should be made about it. The maleness and femaleness inherent in Crawford's "trinity" have been turned by Reaney into a "Trinity" that existed "before God created the angels". This "Trinity", or as Reaney calls it, "this daffodil apocalypse" is re-created, according to Reaney, "whenever two human beings love each other." One doubts if Crawford would have been entirely pleased to see the daffodil mandala worn on the breasts of Max and Alfred. Reaney has castrated the daffodil and made it apply to his own archetypal images. Furthermore, only the first paragraph of his explanation relates closely to the passage in "Malcolm's Katie"; the following four paragraphs describe the daffodil after Reaney has blasted it apart and made the daffodil represent a cosmological unity. No doubt Crawford would recognize the inspiration behind and be sympathetic to Reaney's interpretation of her iconography and her themes.[42] Nevertheless, evil seen "as a line that spins itself up into a circle" sounds familiar and greatly like "insideness and outsideness which slowly spiral upwards". The former is Reaney on Crawford; the latter is Reaney on MacPherson. Both are Reaney on Reaney.

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[41] See for example: Crawford, "Said the Canoe", p. 64.

Finally, one likely would be remiss in not detecting another characteristic of Reaney, the poet, which surfaces in the introduction to Crawford. Expounding enthusiastically on a daffodil theory is not without a certain humour. True to form, it would appear Reaney is being terribly playful at the same time he is very serious.

As I have hoped to point out, albeit from rather limited evidence, Reaney's archetypal criticism complements the archetypal themes that are present in his poetry and his drama. According to his own approach to life and literature, Reaney discovers themes in other writers' poetry which are compatible with his own themes; moreover, his philosophy--far from easy to comprehend fully--offers the critic much material for analysis. It is not surprising, therefore, that sympathetic critics have tended to become engrossed in discussing, with an almost religious fervor, the content of the material instead of the form.

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[42] An archetypal and a romantic vision share the neoplatonic precept that truth and reality are intuitively rather than empirically perceived.

The sympathy that the "earlier" critics expressed when dealing with Reaney's poetry and drama is a testament to the sociological impact that occurred in reaction to the psychological theories of Carl Jung, plus the anthropological research of Sir James Frazer. The collected essays and the texts of Northrop Frye, who applied this psychological and anthropological information to literature, caused an explosion in Canada during the sixties and seventies. The explosion, for better and worse, affected both criticism and literature. In fact, Reaney's critical comments on MacPherson and Crawford are good examples of the way criticism, in Canada especially, wore a philosophical rather than a practical mantle. This stance, it should be noted, was adopted not only because of the writings of Northrop Frye but also because Northrop Frye wrote and codified what many people were thinking.[43] It is Reaney's interest in philosophy as a part of literature which justifies analysis of his critical work in order to show that not only is he very much a "playwright of his time," but also he is a good example of an archetypal philosopher.

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[43] The similarity between the romantic and archetypal visions would make an interesting study in terms of motivation. Both appear to be a reaction against the orthodoxy of religion and the laws of science.

The preceeding, eclectic collection of criticism on Reaney (and briefly, by Reaney), marks only the beginning of an evaluation of Reaney's writing, both poetry and drama. As noted previously, Reaney is still actively working and no criticism can be conclusive; it may be as James Stewart Reaney, in Stage Voices, is quoted as saying, that his father's plays really compose one big play that Reaney keeps writing.[44] One can only hope that future critics of Reaney's drama will see beyond the poetic and artistic principles that guide the mythology inherent in his plays. Indeed, if the present trend continue, critics already seem able and willing to make judgments on Reaney and explain how the form of his drama turns The Donnelly Trilogy into a masterpiece of theatre. For the purpose of practical criticism, in the following chapters I have divided form into two parts which are the following: structure and style. Analysis of the form of The Donnellys will show that Reaney has designed, skillfully and deliberately, both the structure and the style of the trilogy in such a way as to produce a dramatic unit which underlines inherent archetypal themes.

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[44] Geraldine Anthony, ed., Stage Voices (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1978), p. 141.

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Structure

I. Introduction

This chapter offers an analysis of the structure of the three plays in the trilogy, The Donnellys, an examination which includes the plays seen individually and in relation to each other. The discussion is based a priori on the theory that the structure of a play is that part which may be charted or outlined in a fashion similar to the blueprint of a building.

Essentially, there are two charts that can be drawn to graphically represent a play: one showing the emotional structure and one showing the dramatic structure. The emotional structure of a play is invariably linear. Some modern playwrights express disdain for the linear-type dramatic structure as illustrated by Freytag's pyramid (that is: the introduction, complication, rising action, turning point, falling action, catastrophe, denouement). However, as long as the playwright recognizes (as Reaney does) that the emotional structure of a play always builds toward, not away from, the play's greatest moment of intensity, then the dramatic structure (the design of the events) does not need to stick to the demands of the three unities.

The dramatic structure of The Donnellys could be called episodic, except for the fact that the catastrophe underlines each event thereby unifying the episodes. Therefore, because each event is related to the next by an audience's foreknowledge of the massacre and, because events which either "flashback" to or "foreshadow" other events are constantly shifting time, the dramatic structure, if charted, appears to be a gyroscopic arrangement of the episodes. In the following chapter, the gyroscopic design of the dramatic structure as well as the intense moments of the emotional structure, are examined in Sticks and Stones, The St. Nicholas Hotel, and Handcuffs.

Although the Donnelly family, especially Johanna, Will, Jim and Jennie, are the protagonists, in the trilogy the other main "character" is the chorus. Since the chorus is the means whereby the story is told and certain events of the play are emphasized, the function of the chorus--as the structural linchpin of the trilogy--will be discussed as well.

Finally, I want to show that Reaney's intention to turn the Donnelly story from legend into a myth of sociological importance is aided by the structural design he has chosen, especially his decision to use the trilogy form, features of the chorus, and features of epic theatre.

II. Dramatic and Emotional Structures

Drama which is performed on a stage in a theatre (or any similar space ranging from gymnasium to park) has four constant factors: the audience, the actors, the stage area, and a time limit. Within the time limitations, (be they hours or in the case of some plays in India, days), a series of events occur. This series of events, sometimes as busy as it is in farce, with constant running on and off stage and slamming of doors, sometimes as static as it is in Chekov or Beckett, when characters are caught as if in a frieze for extended periods of time, constitutes the dramatic structure. Analyzing the dramatic structure of The Donnelly Trilogy is a good way to remind oneself that no matter how literary the intention of the analysis, the plays have their theatrical characteristics as well as their literary ones and sometimes these characteristics overlap; sometimes they do not. In fact, The Donnelly Trilogy is not so much designed to be read as to be seen and heard. The greatest justification, therefore, for examining the dramatic structure of the script in isolation from its other parts is the supposition that actors may confuse the issue of proper assessment with their good or indifferent stage performances. Often when trying to deal with certain pieces of stage business, a reviewer or critic is hard pressed to know who should take credit or, in some cases, blame for a good or bad piece of work. Without thespians, the director-critic can look at the script as if it were capable of producing the ideal performance. Nevertheless, isolated analysis of dramatic structure does not imply that the structure may in some way be separate from the implicit nature of the text. Most people recognize that the very arrangement or the actual planning of the series of events, is itself a thematic statement. Even so, before the significance of the content can be fully realized, the structure itself, especially such a complicated structure as found in The Donnelly Trilogy, is the first feature worthy of attention.

Although each play of The Donnellys has its own motif, at the core of the trilogy as a whole is the "catastrophe": the murder of the Donnellys by members of their own community. In actual fact, the murder of the Donnellys took place in Biddulph County, near Lucan, Ontario, February 4, 1880. How much the audience knows of the situation in a sense depends on the region in which the play is produced. A Stratford or London audience will likely be familiar with the Donnelly legend whereas Western audiences may know very little about the event itself let alone the stories surrounding the event. One does not have to know much about the legend in detail to enjoy or understand the plays except for the fact, likely given by director or author's note in the playbill, that several members of the Donnelly family are murdered. This advance information is significant because if an audience comes to the play armed with the knowledge of the eventual catastrophe, the playwright is released from the constraints of a linear plot. The audience knows "what" happens; the matters to be explored are: why? how?

The playwright's decision to suppose that the audience has foreknowledge of the Donnelly murders is a tremendously significant factor. The entire dramatic structure of the trilogy is based upon the idea that the story is a well-known legend. The audience's foreknowledge of the final catastrophe is a major condition that the three plays share; moreover, the connection between the fact that the audience knows before it happens what dreadful calamity is going to occur, and the fact of viewing the unfolding of "cheek-by-jowl"[1] episodes, makes an interesting, and experimental, structural design.

This interesting design, if charted, would have to show how the catastrophe permeates every action.

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[1] "Cheek-by-jowl" is an explanation used by Reaney when he is interviewed by Geraldine Antony in Stage Voices, p. 143.

Somehow, a circle should be inside a circle. The physical properties of the gyroscope respect the design of the suggested chart and literally bring the chart to life.[2] The principle of the gyroscope, "a wheel mounted in a ring so that its axis is free to turn in any direction [in order that] when the wheel is spun rapidly it will keep its original plane of rotation no matter which way the wheel is turned",[3] is at least one way to attempt to describe the pattern or design behind the dramatic structure as a whole. The catastrophe, because it is known, is the "constant" or the "plane" of the gyroscope. The events which circle the catastrophe, at the same time as they maintain their relationship to it, are the wheel of the gyroscope.

In the first play, Sticks and Stones, the wheel of the gyroscope is relatively large. The radial distance between the edge of the wheel (the events) and "the plane of rotation" (the catastrophe) is greater than the distance between events and catastrophe in The St. Nicholas Hotel, when Mike is killed, or finally in Handcuffs when the five other Donnellys are murdered. All the plays seem to be structured like wheels with events circling around a constant plane. However, the gyroscopes themselves become smaller as the near annhilation of the family becomes closer. For example, the actual event which begins Sticks and Stones is Will's twelfth birthday in 1857, although reference is made to the founding of the Whitefeet secret society in Tipperary in 1761.[4] The action of the play extends (by reference) to Andrew Keefe's departure from the township in 1867. In its broadest scope, Sticks and Stones encompasses the time between 1761 and 1880 (even perhaps 1974) but in specific terms, the time of events can be dated to include approximately ten years, from 1857 to 1867. The St. Nicholas Hotel begins with Will's purchase of the London-Exeter stagecoach line in 1873 and concludes with Mike's murder in 1879, covering a period of six years. Handcuffs opens with Mrs. Donnelly's arrest by James Carroll in St. Thomas, January 15, 1880, and Act II ends with the murder of Jim, Johanna, Bridget, Tom and John Donnelly, February 4, 1880--or, in effect the two acts refer to the last three weeks of their lives. Act III of Handcuffs brings the action to the present or the early 1970's. From the founding of the Whitefeet society to approximately 1970 includes 109 years but from the actual beginning of the play in 1857 to final community uprising, the duration of events may be considered to be about twenty-three years. The handcuffs that snap shut around the Donnellys in the final play are already in place in *Sticks and Stones* but events that take place over ten years create a larger wheel than events that occur in a period of three weeks.

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[2] This term is metaphorical but since the image is concrete, I believe it is useful.

[3] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

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[4] This date is given by James Noonan in "Chronology of Important Dates" in Sticks and Stones, p.171.

Events which spin around the catastrophe sometimes appear unrelated, giving rise to the speculation that individually the plays are episodic in nature, especially *Sticks and Stones*, which covers so many areas of life in Biddulph. Thus, if the plays were merely episodic then episode one in *Sticks and Stones* would be the introduction of the main characters, Will, Johanna and Jim Donnelly and the reason that they have left Ireland for Ontario in order to seek freedom from persecution. Mrs. Donnelly tells Will:

> We're not there anymore, Will. We're where *you* were born - not on old country, but a new country these Canadas. Only bullies and blowhards say at you: "You won't know the day nor the hour nor the night when we'll come to ____"[5]

But, since the major catastrophe is already understood by the audience and since knowledge of this disaster underlines every statement the characters make, Mrs. Donnelly's declaration to her son is heavy with dramatic irony and this first episode in the play has nicely laid the groundwork for the divisions that will occur in the new community. Similarily, it can be shown that even though each episode may break up unity of time or action, the episode relates directly to the downfall of the protagonists. Moreover, present time is definitely fragmented in this first scene. No sooner does Mrs. Donnelly mention the Whitefeet in Ireland than a map of Ireland is shown to the audience before which the chorus--men dressed as ladies burning down a house-- re-enacts some of the terrors that the family had to face in Ireland. Unity of action is fragmented in the present as well. The next episode, introducing a surveyor and his son, has no direct relationship to Will's birthday but serves to show another major point of disagreement in the community: the way the government has decided to divide up land. Immediately, the priest enters the already complicated situation, thematically bringing the institution of the Roman Catholic church into question and dramatically establishing the intricate relationship between episodes.[6] However, by the end of Act I of Sticks and Stones, it should be apparent that the audience is not watching merely unrelated episodes but another gyroscope in action whose "plane of rotation" is not only the major catastrophe but also the erstwhile, smaller catastrophe of James Donnelly's killing of Pat Farl at a logging bee. Certainly, this smaller catastrophe contributes to the greater one just as each event builds on the back of the other; but, in their own sphere, the events around each minor catastrophe seem to possess a similar structural framework as the major catastrophe. The term gyroscope, although a purely figurative description of the structure, indicates a nice relationship between the episodes and the constant suggestion of catastrophe. Whether disaster is major (the murder of five Donnellys) or minor (the murder of Pat Farl and Mike Donnelly), death by violence is a constant presence. Moreover, this constant and pervasive image of death and doom prevents the audience from becoming hopelessly confused by seemingly disjointed episodes.

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[5] *Sticks and Stones*, p. 44.

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[6] The priest asks, "Who are punished for a

Despite the gyroscopic nature of the dramatic

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time in purgatory." His question both foreshadows the death of the Donnellys and suggests the major structural divisions of the plays: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. These divisions are discussed in conjunction with the stylistic consideration of language.

structure, the plays do build up to a traditional emotional climax. The so-called plane of the gyroscope tilts the events in a figuratively upward angle until the highest emotional point reached is always at the end of the act. Just because the events are apparently gyroscopic, one should not presume that the emotional build-up of the dramatic structure is random or casual or circular.[7] All acts end either with a minor catastrophe or reference to the major catastrophe.

The high points of each act in the trilogy are easily ennumerated. In Sticks and Stones, Act II, final sequence, Mrs. Donnelly is in conversation with her own ghost who is actually "her deep down dead leaf self". The ghost warns Mrs. Donnelly that if she and her family stay in Biddulph the Donnellys will face rejection by both church and community. The ghost says, "you'll die unconfessed, Judith Donnelly. And wander these roads for a certain while." When Mrs. Donnelly leaves the ghost to walk toward her husband who is coming home after serving his seven-year prison term, the ghost mutters ominously:

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[7] Whether or not a plot is a linear unfolding of events or a series of unconnected episodes, the emotional structure of the drama demands that the climax (the highest emotional point) should occur at the end rather than at the beginning of a play.

> Yes, sleep here if you can. Mrs. Shea held her child in the rain barrel while a mob of 400 set fire to their house. She held and held until past the borders of life.[8]

The chill of imminent death occurs again and again. In the same play, Act III, final episode, Jennie makes two rather long speeches concluding with yet another reference to the fire in which her mother and father have perished, (in time) and will perish (in drama). Jennie's speech, which is blatantly didactic, re-inforces the idea of a gyroscopic structure. Here she shows playgoers that the death of her parents is a constant presence. When Jennie speaks as an actress in present time, then the deaths have already occurred. When Jennie speaks as a character in a play, the deaths are prophetically foretold. Turning to the audience, Jennie says:

> I loved my mother and I nearly saved
> her even three days before they burnt
> her with their coal oil.
> Because you were tall; you were
> different and you weren't afraid, that
> is why they burnt you first with their
> tongues/then with their kerosene.[9]

This structural technique, this constant reminder of death

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[8] Sticks and Stones, p. 138.

[9] Sticks and stones, p. 154.

--impending death or actual death--is repeated in The St. Nicholas Hotel. Act I ends with Maggie's death and her final words, repeated, "I love William Donnelly"[10]; Act II ends with Will saying to Carroll, "So you clubbed [Johanna] to kneel at your feet, but you forget that our eyes don't kneel...". Carroll replies, "It's true. I couldn't club down their eyes...I hate William Donnelly, I hate William Donnelly".[11] The lights of Act III fade on the maid who scrubs the floor of the bar saying, "that's the blood of Michael Donnelly on the floor there. No matter how hard you try, it never comes out."[12] Similarly, in Handcuffs, beginning with the statement, "five dead people are leaving this house" and extending from "Will Donnelly, your father and mother are dead" to the final "Requiescant in Pace", the structural design of ending each act with a reference to death reveals an expected consistency. In fact, nine acts finish by referring to the demonic or unnatural deaths of members of the community.

The constant reminder of death by catastrophe sends an audience out to intermission and finally home very much aware of the physical aspect of the tragedy which is the actual murder of these people by a secret society. Since the catastrophe in a play is the ultimate metaphor of dramatic conflict--a physical collision of two forces--which underlines the polemics of the drama, the same catastrophe, by its very nature, creates an emotional moment for an audience. Emotional moments, despite anything that Brecht says to the contrary tend to be the stock and trade of even the most didactic or socially-oriented plays. Such a statement does not mean to imply that playwrights will choose sloppy sentimentalizing of character over an intelligent portrayal, but rather that playwrights recognize that the sensibilities of their audiences should somehow be disturbed. For example, sensibilities are disturbed in a psychological drama by empathy, "there but for the Grace of God go I" or, in a social or epic drama, by Entfremdung[13], "How can people behave in such a way?!" Reaney also counts on his audience's reaction, both intellectual and emotional, in order to achieve his plays' acceptance by that audience. Despite what Brecht may say about the objectivity of an audience, one must doubt that any playwright wants his audience to leave the theatre saying, "so what?"[14] As a clever and successful playwright, Reaney realizes that the emotional structuring of the trilogy has as much to do with the plays' dramatic success as the planned structure of events has to do with the thematic statement that is interesting to pure literary analysis. Therefore, although critics tend to devote much attention to theme and meaning, in order to appreciate Reaney the dramatist, they ought not to ignore the emotional structure of each act of each play. Reaney constantly exploits the murder of the Donnellys, thereby keeping a firm grip upon the attention of the audience. He never lets his audience forget what happened to the Donnellys in February, 1880.

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[10] The St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 58.

[11] The St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 113.

[12] The St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 153.

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[13] Brecht's own term. The usual expression is Verfremdung. This term is properly thought of as "distancing" in order to get a proper view. Alienation has some negative and misleading connotations.

If one recognizes that its impact on an audience's sensibilities is part of a particular drama's success, one may wonder what, if any, is the peculiar impact of The Donnellys. Aristotle called the disturbance of sensibility, "catharsis", that ineffable force which allows an audience to return home clean and whole in spirit having been purged of and freed from the pity and terror which were aroused then released by the catastrophe.[15] In the Greek type of linear tragedy the audience seems to say to itself "Right. That's it. No more." There is not an Aristotelian-type release in Reaney's trilogy. The catastrophe in The Donnellys is not one horrible bolt such as occurs when Oedipus, the King, gouges out his eyes (offstage), but rather it is a continual shock. The physical dimension of the tragedy in the three plays is the trilogy's ultimate paradox: the catastrophe (the spectacle) never occurs and yet is always present. Moreover, this paradox, the constant presence of a non-event, makes a thematic statement and a dramatic statement. The dramatic statement, which is of concern at this point, is probably best expressed in impressionist terms. The plays are so complex in detail (names alone demand a prodigious memory on the part of the audience), that playgoers are affected more by a sensation or apprehension of coming doom than they are released from terror by any cathartic impulses. The forces of good and evil such as they are in this community, continue, are meant to continue, giving the impression of physical death in the mind of the audiences, long after details of the episodes are forgotten.

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[14] In my opinion, if an audience is neither emotionally nor intellectually "disturbed" at a play's moment of highest intensity (i.e. at or near the conclusion), then the playwright has failed in his task.

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[15] Aristotle, Poetics, in Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1952), p. 19.

However, as successful as the gyroscopic structure is for Reaney, still the method does have its pitfalls. On occasion, one gyroscopic episode is more powerful than the following sequences. When this off-balance sequence occurs, the linear development of the emotional structure is interrupted. For example, the strength and cleverness of the final scene of Act I, St. Nicholas Hotel, supercedes the emotional impact of Acts II and III. Act I, as has been mentioned, closes with the death of Maggie Donovan. Maggie, snatched away from the arms of her lover, has wasted away in a convent. Maggie's body lies stage centre, stretched out in front of the sisters of the convent who are pondering where to bury her. The lady pining away, dying from unrequited love, a figure both isolated and supported by the discipline of the church, is a purely romantic notion, nearly a sentimental cliche, of the kind that would win the hearty approval of Edgar Allan Poe who found the death of a beautiful woman the ultimate in poetical subjects.[16] Reaney's conclusion to Act I, nearly bathetic in print, yet highly successful on stage, is one of the many examples of his eclectic contributions to "dramatic truth". Maggie Donovan of the play was actually Margaret Thompson. She died many years after the stagecoach line folded;[17] and, she did marry, although she married someone of her father's choice.[18] While one may assume that real Margaret never forgot Will, indeed, never stopped caring for the man, Reaney's alteration of the facts to produce stage Maggie's convent-demise creates a powerful piece of stage business. An audience who returns to Act II to see, a few minutes into the play, that Maggie's position is being usurped by Norah Macdonald (Kennedy)[19] may feel that time and events have rather too quickly disposed of Maggie's memory. Will's stagecoach may well have slowed down at the old chestnut tree but Norah's immediate arrival on the scene in Act II makes Will look guilty of disloyalty, and reduces an audience's sympathy for his character. Reaney should make sure that his most powerful images occur last; he should ensure that each emotional moment is succeeded eventually by a more powerful emotional moment or the steady build-up of dramatic tension will slide into apathy. Mike and Nellie do not have a dramatic power to equal Maggie and Will; nor do Will and Norah take control by virtue of some complex personal relationship. The Maggie episode is over in Act I but the power of the final scene of Act I, St. Nicholas Hotel, haunts the rest of the play and beggars the impact of the final acts. Poe knew what he was saying when he extolled the poetic effect of beauty dying. There is nothing in the rest of the play equal to this catastrophe (the result, by the way, of a few fairly linear sequences)[20] that closes Act I.

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[16] Edgar Allan Poe, The Philosophy of Composition, Graham's Magazine, 1846.

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[17] She actually outlives Will. The nun's query about burying her beside the grave of Will Donnelly may easily be missed or misinterpreted by the audience who may remember only Will's singing of "Buffalo Gals" at the end of the act.

[18] Orlo Miller, The Donnellys Must Die (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1962), p. 85.

[19] For information on Norah Kennedy see Orlo Miller, pp. 8-13.

III. The Chorus

In The Donnelly Trilogy the arrangement of events or the dramatic structure has been compared metaphorically to a gyroscope or a wheel of detail surrounding a central plane. The central plane, that is, all the implications of catastrophe, is found to be amazingly, almost daringly simple. Not simple, however, is the wheel of detail which circles the plane. Occurrences past, present, future; names by the hundreds; plays within plays; music: singing, dancing; puppets; magic-lantern shadows; props: ladders, barrels, tops, maps, sticks, stones et al--this accumulation of details which make up a sequence (and the accumulation of sequences which make up an act) gives each of the plays the aura of a circus. The events of this circus are held together by the chorus.

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[20] The love story of Maggie and Will begins when Maggie is forced to take Finnegan's stage instead of the Donnelly stage which she prefers. Although there are sub-plots unfolding in the following sequences, Maggie is virtually at the centre of the action until the end of the act.

The chorus is not a separate group or an entity unto itself, but rather it is an integral part of the community of actors on stage. The first act of Sticks and Stones refers to over thirty speaking parts, not including "others", and yet only eleven players are mentioned in the opening credits of the text, indicating in the original production at least, that actors assumed more than one role.[21] Not only do the actors assume many individual speaking parts, but also they become the chorus and sing, or dance, or speak in unison. The size of the chorus appears to fluctuate, at times encompassing as many as nine actors in Sticks and Stones.[22] All in all, the chorus has much to do in the three plays, more than is obvious at first glance. An ancient dramatic convention, the chorus is the linchpin of Reaney's trilogy, both structurally and thematically.

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[21] The only exception may be the actors who play Jim and Johanna Donnelly. The separateness of the senior Donnellys from other members of the cast seems to reflect their indomitability as well as their transendence over the rest of the community.

In order to show that the structure of the trilogy depends so much on the chorus, I feel it necessary to point out just how inclusive the word is. In all likelihood, the word "chorus" comes from the Greek noun "khoros" which is in turn derived from the verb "choreuein" --to dance. The "dancing" aspect of the word in modern usage, unless one thinks of a chorus line--perhaps the precision dancing of the Rockettes of Radio City Music Hall --tends to be confused with the vocal connotations of the word. A group of singers (as opposed to a soloist) is called a chorus; the repeated stanza in a song is called the chorus. Even so, persons familiar with the history of drama probably associate the work chorus with the plays of

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[22] The St. Nicholas Hotel lists fifteen actors; Handcuffs lists fourteen. The ranks of the chorus probably swell accordingly.

Aeschylus and Sophocles. In fact, the variety of meanings of chorus as used in current vernacular is based upon the various functions of the chorus in Greek dithyramb and tragic drama. There seems to be consensus among historians that the movement of the chorus in Greek tragedy consisted of definite steps performed in a ritualized manner. Aristotle himself mentions that the chorus "should act as one";[23] he was probably at once commenting on tradition and giving sanction to it. The function of the chorus required a combination of song and movement which was precision dancing with voices raised in unison. The choral interlude of a Greek tragedy was divided into three parts: strophe, antistrophe, epode. The chanting chorus moved across stage in one direction (strophe), then repeated the action in the same metrical rhythm as it returned back across the stage (antistrophe). The final division, the epode, was delivered by the chorus, standing still, stage centre.[24] In early Greek drama the interludes involved the singing of odes by the chorus although the lines of the chorus leader were spoken. Ode, from the Greek word oide (song, from aeidein, to sing) meant originally "words intended to be sung". Therefore, choral ode, as found in Greek drama, literally means dancing song. Each of the three plays in The Donnelly Trilogy opens with the chorus singing. The "Ballad of John Barleycorn" starts Sticks and Stones; an overture containing "St. Patrick", "Hector O'Hara's Jubilee Song", and "Buffalo Gals" begins The St. Nicholas Hotel; "When You and I Were Young, Maggie", "Grandfather's Clock" and other "Victorian Parlour Songs"[25] introduce the action of Handcuffs. Like the chorus of ancient drama, Reaney's chorus sings, speaks, dances; his chorus often moves in a ritualized manner and chorus members repeat verses of songs (or portions of ritual dances as if they were repeating a stanza or verse) to underline the dramatic action in the play. Not only does the chorus begin each play in the trilogy, but also members of the chorus step forward to give a variety of solo performances after which they re-join the chorus. Understanding the function and nature of the chorus in the dramatic structure of the trilogy makes the events of the gyroscope (the wheel of detail) appear less as a random selection of incidents which relate only to catastrophe and more as an emanation from the collective mind of the chorus.

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[23] Poetics, p. 21

[24] "Chorus" Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics, ed. Preminger, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 124.

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[25] St. Nicholas Hotel, Introduction, p. 17.

The chorus, after having sung the opening songs, uses the stanzas from these overtures to undercut the dramatic action of the play. This technique is consistent in both Sticks and Stones and St. Nicholas Hotel and present, although not as formally effective, in Handcuffs. Sticks and Stones begins with "the drunken and rowdy singing of a tavern song" which is "The Ballad of John Barleycorn".[26] After Will recites the three sacraments in the Roman Catholic church that can be received only once, others (later directly called, chorus [27]) repeat the first stanza of John Barleycorn, beginning, "Oh, three men went to Deroughata...". The tie between "three" sacraments and "three" men as emphasized by the intrusion and repetition of the ballad is a dramatic method of drawing the audience's attention to what is being said by a more or less figurative underlining of the text. The chorus continually intrudes upon the action of Sticks and Stones with the John Barleycorn Ballad, especially in Act I, "sequence one", which immediately precedes the entrance of the surveyor and boy. Although the chorus is busy with a variety of activities in the following sequences in Act I, the Barleycorn ballad is not sung again until the end of the act and then repeated at the ends of Act II and Act III. The repetition of the ballad serves as a reminder to the audience both of the holy nature of Mrs. Donnelly (the opening scene where we first meet her) and the rural, Dionysian character of the villagers at harvest time. The ballad with its references to "barley grain should die" and "reaper" in the fashion of a conundrum or riddle song, makes an inference very readily picked up by the audience and no doubt interpreted as a foreshadowing of death. Therefore, the repetition of these stanzas acts as a device to create suspense, and suspense is very much a function of plot or structure. If an actor during the course of a conflict keeps humming either in the protagonist's or antagonist's ear, "you're going to get it", a thrill of anticipation must run through those who are viewing the conflict.

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[26] Press Porcepic's 3rd printing with revisions, May, 1976, contains an error in the second stanza. The ballad form is usually made up of a quatrain (4 lines) and a refrain. In the nine other stanzas, the lines are four in number, but stanza two has five lines. "Then winter being over/and the summer coming on," should be one line, not two.

[27] Sticks and Stones, p. 47.

Not only does repetition of stanzas create suspense, but it acts also as a kind of mild catharsis after the catastrophe finally happens. After the massacre has occurred, repetition of the phrase (or stanza from the ballad) happens once again and the words, now devoid of suspense, become a final summation fit for the tombstone. The Barleycorn ballad sung at the end of the play represents such finality of hope that it becomes cathartic, a mild release for the audience from the time-honored emotions of suspense, fear, pity. In Reaney's play, the Donnellys are misunderstood and mistreated by the community: some people have lied about Jim Donnelly's motives at the logging bee; Johanna Donnelly has had no end of difficulty in running the farm and rearing her family alone; she has had to expend enormous energy getting up a petition for the commutation of her husband's execution. Still she vows, ironically, not to leave Biddulph. The humming and background singing that the audience has been hearing throughout is repeated once again, finally:

> Then they drank you in the kitchen
> And they drank me in the hall
> But the drunkard he used you worse
> He pissed you against the wall.[28]

The Donnellys are used badly; their potential contribution to the community is wasted. The ballad which first creates the hum of suspense has now become an epitaph.

In The St. Nicholas Hotel, a variety of songs form the overture, but the song with the most significance, the one that acts similarly to "John Barleycorn" in underlining the action, creating suspense, and producing catharsis, is "Buffalo Gals". "Buffalo Gals" is the tune that is associated with the love between Will Donnelly and Maggie Donovan. However, unlike "John Barleycorn", the ballad in Sticks and Stones which Reaney uses with precision to reinforce aspects of the drama, "Buffalo Gals" becomes slightly out of focus. In other words, a gap exists between what the song should be underlining and what it actually does. Part of the problem occurs because instead of depending on one ballad to carry the load of suspense and emphasis, Reaney has decided upon a selection of tunes to fulfill his dramatic purposes in Act I of The St. Nicholas Hotel. There are times even when Reaney does not call the tune but refers only to "fiddle", presumably leaving the choice of song up to the director.[29] "Buffalo Gals" is repeated three times in the last half of Act I. A careful second look at the text seems to indicate that the tune is connected with "shadows", the shadows of change and doom. The first time the audience hears "Buffalo Gals" the stage directions say, "the chorus illustrate the shadows changing of [sic] the buildings", and the second time, a mother says, "The shadows are getting so long they're joining together...".[30] The presence of shadows, or foreshadowing of death, should be and likely is designed to apply to Maggie who dies at the end of Act I and then to Mike who is killed at the end of the play. At least, that seems to be Reaney's intention.

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[28] Sticks and Stones, p. 156.

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[29] During the scene when Maggie and Will "start rolling on the floor towards each other" references are made to "fiddle" without a specific tune requested by the playwright. P. 40, p. 41.

Two factors preclude success. First, the shadow imagery is not really clear enough. To be truly effective, the song and the shadow image should be repeated, graphically, more than twice. Second, the song representing death becomes easily confused not with Maggie's death, but with the more romantic notion of the unrequited love between Maggie and Will. Although a background rendition of "Buffalo Gals" follows information that the driver of the Finnegan Stage Line has been killed, by the same token, the melody occurs just before Maggie's scene with Aunt Theresa, Fat Lady and Father. It is very easy for the audience to think of "love" not "death" when they hear it, especially since the next time the song is heard occurs after Maggie calls to Will for help. Finally, after the Sisters of the Convent decide to bury Maggie at the gate

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[30] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 51.

(presumably so she will continue to hear the clatter of the Donnelly stage on the cobbles) and when Maggie's voice is heard to say, "I love William Donnelly", William steps forward from the chorus to sing, solo:

I asked her if she'd be my wife
Be my wife, be my wife
She'd make me happy all my life
If she stood by my side.[31]

Of course, Maggie and Will's disappointment, their unfulfilled expectations can be blamed on the community's rejection of Will. First Will is rejected and then Mike is killed. "Buffalo Gals", a reprise, the song that should epitomise rejection and death, is repeated at the play's conclusion. Stage directions state, "outside the sun is just getting up. The old tramp is whistling 'Buffalo Gals' as he walks up the empty Main Street of Waterford." A maid says that Mike's blood will stain the floor forever and the whistling of "Buffalo Gals" fades away. But, "Buffalo Gals" is the song that belongs to Maggie and Will, reminds the audience of Maggie's abduction. Even Will's apparent grief over their unrequited love is not comparable to Maggie's suffering because his unhappiness is mitigated by his marriage to Norah. And Mike's death, although horrific, unjust, and violent, is quick, so that even his death does not involve the suffering one supposes that Maggie endured. Thus, "Buffalo Gals" at the conclusion of the play evokes the memory of Maggie more than it represents a foreshadowed fate come to pass.

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[31] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 59.

The technique of dramatically underlining the text in Handcuffs, the final play of the trilogy, seems to move away from repetition of a song's stanza, refrain or chorus as a method of emphasizing the action. Reaney has turned instead to a dance motif. Like the songs, however, the dances performed by soloists as well as by the group, are intended to affirm theme and create an atmosphere of suspense. Jennie Currie, the Donnelly's only daughter, is dancing at the beginning of the play. She says she was taught to dance by her mother who "had arms like wings." Jennie's dance, especially her upraised arms, directs the audience's attention to the forthcoming bird imagery. At the opening of Act II, the wild bird trapped in the chimney of the Bishop's fireplace is allowed to escape only to be shunned and then pecked and buffeted by other birds. The wild bird becomes Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly "about to be surrounded by a mob and killed."[32] As well, Jennie's dance foreshadows Maria Keefe's wedding dance which occurs one month after Mike's death. An interesting stage direction makes it clear to the reader of the script, if not to the audience, that should the boys dance at Maria's nuptial celebrations, they then cannot be guilty of barn burning. Reaney says in the stage directions:

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[32] Handcuffs, p. 81.

> This sequence is a reprise that brings together the musical and dance themes of the whole trilogy. What the dancers (chorus) are trying to do is make enough noise to attract the Donnelly boys to dance. What they don't realize, of course, is that if the boys do come to the dance Carroll cannot accuse them of burning down Marksey's barn which is about to go up in flames; he will then in desperation turn upon their mother and father.[33]

Of course, "The Haymakers' Reel" and "Schottische" along with the ballads and songs of the trilogy do make a colourful and exciting stage spectacle. The excitement of stage activity is enough of an excuse in itself to justify the use of spectacle; but, spectacle combined with dramatic purpose (that is, suspense. Will the boys be lured to the dance?) is in keeping with the manner in which Reaney structures the singing and dancing functions of the chorus.[34]

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[33] Handcuffs, p. 98.

[34] My attention is drawn to two aspects of the reel, which the O.E.D. calls a "lively esp. Scottish dance usually of two couples in line and describing circular

The chorus' repetition of ballad stanzas and dance patterns, functions as a leitmotif which continually reminds the audience of Reaney's two over-riding themes: death and resurrection or transcendence of death. In Sticks and Stones, the "John Barleycorn" ballad personifies the life, death, and resurrection of corn liquor. Even though the song concludes with a crude though effective reference to the wasteful death of John Barleycorn, the cyclical planting and reaping of farm crops is implicit in the song. One imagines that next spring the corn will be re-planted, and John Barleycorn will rise again. Like John Barleycorn, the Donnelly's capacity for positive contribution is wasted by the comunity; but, their "spirits", in the form of the legend that grows up around them, never leave Biddulph. In The St. Nicholas Hotel, "Buffalo Gals" also functions as a leitmotif for death and resurrection. The final line of the first stanza which goes, "And dance by the light of the moon," may be used by Reaney to refer to the danse macabre. "...by the light of the moon" suggests that the dance occurs at night almost as

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figures", and they are the circular motion of the dance and the speed of the music. The latter no doubt causes the dancers to reel literally, and the former, as far as the third play of the trilogy is concerned, is probably a musical personification of Handcuffs. Support for this idea is found in a stage note Sticks and Stones, p. 53.

if it were a pagan (fairy) ceremony. The danse macabre or "dance of death" is a symbolic performance which whirls people away, one after the other, to their deaths much in the way that the Donnellys are being whirled away to death, albeit slowly at first. "...by the light of the moon", also suggests that the persons who are responsible for the dance have been affected or crazed by the moon. In any event, the moon, like the harvest, is cyclical. On cloudless nights the moon becomes visible thereby allowing the dance of death to happen over again. The same parallel that was drawn between Barleycorn and the Donnellys may be drawn here as well. The Donnellys can be removed from the community by their enemies, but with each moon the community will have to repeat its dance of death because the Donnellys have become an ethereal rock of Sisyphus, and their presence, in the form of legend, will roll back continually into the middle of the dance circle. Finally, in Handcuffs, the dance of death and resurrection is performed by Jennie. At the beginning of the play, Jennie ties the dance (death) and bird (resurrection) imagery together when she says, "My mother, Theresa, had arms like wings. We'd be all alone in the house and she'd teach me how to dance." Instead of making the normal association between dancing and feet, Reaney joins dancing imagery together with uplifted arms and bird wings. Whenever a dance is performed in Handcuffs, the initial dance of Jennie, which celebrates the indomitable strength of her mother, is called to mind. Thus, in this play, music and action, rather than music and words, are the leitmotif, the reminder that flesh, which is finite, is transcended by spirit or legend.

In retrospect, one is able to see how Reaney has used the singing and dancing of the chorus to underline and emphasize the dramatic action of individual sequences. The playwright then has expanded and transformed his design by using the same songs and dances in almost a Wagnerian manner, to represent the unifying motif of the trilogy which is the idea of death and transcendence of death. Only once do the lines of the design appear to become blurred. When "Buffalo Gals" as a leitmotif becomes more associated with Maggie than with the idea of a continuing life cycle, Reaney's middle play appears inconsistent with the other two parts of the trilogy. Analysis of "Buffalo Gals" shows that this discrepancy is not the case. The three plays are consistent. However, the structure of The St. Nicholas Hotel is not as dramatically sound as Sticks and Stones or Handcuffs.

One of the attributes of the chorus in ancient drama was its custom of repeating words and actions associated with religious rites.[35] Ritual, as the observance or celebration of rite is called, involves the chanting of prescribed lines by a group who share a common belief. Ritualized chanting (sung or spoken in Latin, circa 1880, or in the lifetime of the Donnellys) is used by members of the Roman Catholic congregation and their priest when they celebrate the holy rites of the church. Involved in the trilogy are not only three sacraments named by Will --Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders--but also the celebration of Eucharist, the duty of penance, the comfort of extreme unction, and the consecration of marriage. Each of the seven sacraments has its own particular ritual to which Reaney's chorus alludes or directly refers. Of great significance is the way in which Reaney's chorus uses the rituals of Roman Catholicism to reveal the dual nature of the chorus itself.

The dual personality of the chorus is most obvious when it physically divides itself into sticks and stones; however, this same duality is subtly illustrated when Latin liturgy is performed. Early in the trilogy, playgoers see that the stones represent the Roman Line while the sticks represent the Protestant Line. Sticks and stones are mutual enemies who hurl invective and missiles at each other catching the Donnellys in the middle of their fight. It is important to note that apprehension of the nasty results of their animosity and their verbal and physical cross-firing is not accessible to the chorus but is well appreciated by the audience who knows exactly where this behaviour will lead.[36] The chorus divides itself and because it is divided, disaster will be the outcome of conflict. The ingenuous nature of the chorus and its readiness to divide itself into opposing camps as well as its failure to perceive the tragic outcome of divisiveness, is cleverly exploited by Reaney in the most effective and satiric dramatic irony in the plays: the use of the Latin liturgy. Because of the candid, nearly naive, character of the chorus, excerpts from the Roman Catholic ritualistic celebration of the sacraments are sincere and inspirational at the same time as they appear hollow and false. The rituals are comforting to those people who believe in the sacraments (The Donnellys) but the solemn celebration of rite is a collection of meaningless, empty, totally ironic gestures and words for those who are busily engaged in breaking the laws of the church. The audience surely cannot fail to appreciate both the sincerity of the chorus and the irony of its posture. In Sticks and Stones, the chorus says:

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[35] Preminger, p. 124.

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[36] The chorus is traditionally less perceptive than the audience is. Immediately, playgoers will sense the naivete of any chorus which allows itself to become divided.

> Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix (Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi).[37]

For young Will, who thinks the Bishop knows why God made him a cripple, the chorus' plea to the Virgin Mary is devout and moving; for the Ryans, Cassleigh, the census taker, even for the same chorus who becomes divided into sticks and stones, the words, "that we may be made worthy", are so heavily satiric that they are damning, and become both the trial and final judgment of all the unworthy people in the community.

In Handcuffs, the chorus appropriately and it would seem, innocently, provides a proper sanctified atmosphere for the Priest, and for Father Connolly, who hears O'Halloran's complaints against the Donnellys. While O'Halloran chants his grievances, the pious chorus also chants, "Domine, non sum dignus. (Lord, I am not worthy)." While it is true by Christian standards that none of us (born in sin) is worthy, some, to coin a phrase, are less worthy than others. Father Connolly, who refuses to hear John Donnelly's Confession and who plots with O'Halloran against the Donnellys (without checking the truth of the allegations against them), is even more unworthy than the average person in the drama because he is a man who has devoted his life to God. However, the irony of what the chorus is saying here and the pious manner in which they say it does not mean that use of the sincere chorus is always ironic. When the five coffins of the murdered family are taken out of the church and carried into the graveyard at the end of the Handcuffs, the chorus sings:

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[37] Pray for us, holy God of our fathers (that we may bring about the promise of Christ).

> May the angels take you into paradise
> in two adventu suscipiant te Martyres
> And lead you into the holy city of
> Jerusalem Chorus angelorum te
> suscipiat[38]

The plea of the chorus, honest and straightforward, would not work as an emotional moment had not Reaney taken great care in developing the duality of the chorus. The gap between what the audience knows and what the lagging chorus knows allows the chorus to become an effective instrument of dramatic irony as well as a means of conveying the pathos arising from the plight of the trapped then murdered

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[38] Handcuffs, p. 157.

Donnellys. In other words, the audience will not expect, does not expect, satire every time the chorus appears since Reaney has taken great care that the chorus never becomes a caricature of itself through self-parody.

The complexity of the structure of The Donnellys invites and withstands a good deal of probing. In general, the dominant characteristics of the plays' structures may be summarized in the following way. In each play, the essential storyline is chronological (the murder of Farl, then the murder of Mike, then the massacre). However, the audience's foreknowledge of the catastrophe minimizes the necessity of a strictly sequential arrangement of events. Each act and each play conclude with raised emotional impact. The chorus is the linchpin of the structure providing information, music, emphasis, satire, dramatic irony, situational irony, and poignancy. Because conventional scene changes do not occur, one sequence runs into another, setting a frantic pace which is relieved only at the end of each act. It should be noted that understanding the structure is a far cry from understanding the totality of these three plays. But, it is necessarily the first step. Thus, the preceding investigation of some of the broad structural features which the three plays have in common provides support for the claim that Reaney is truly a skillful stage dramatist, not just a poet who pens closet drama.

IV. Structure and Myth

The first questions to be asked are: what is an archetypal myth? are all myths archetypal? and, how does myth pertain to the structure of literature?

An archetype is an original model, say the model "x", upon which all following models of "x" are shaped. An archetypal critic of literature believes that both individuals and societies remember somewhere in their conscious or subconscious minds what their primordial selves (their original models) were like and how they behaved. Apparently, so powerful are these archetypes, that memory of primordial models surfaces in psychology, religion and, of course, literature. There may be archetypal motivations behind lyric poetry but archetypes are most easily recognizable when they turn up in certain myths. An archetypal myth is one, therefore, whose story and whose hero appear to be based on an earlier model. The archetypist is ever on the alert for ritualistic behaviour in humans, or signs of man's dependence for survival on climate and seasons. Archetypal myths refer to the way things are and always have been. "The Sleeping Beauty", and "The King of the Golden River" are stories that do not pass judgment on kings, third sons, or heroes. In archetypal myths all characters do, in an almost deterministic way, what they must do.

But there is another whole body of myths, of less stature in literature than the archetypal myth, that implicitly does pass judgment on the characters in the tale. These are the myths, handed down from parent to child, which are called fables and parables. Both fables and parables have a didactic nature. "The Boy who Cried Wolf", "The Three Little Pigs", and "The Ant and the Grasshopper" all give advice on behaviour. Although the wolf and the pig may be called archetypal representatives of human aggressiveness or human greed, essentially the fable-parable is instructive. Like the archetype, the fable-parable shows up in story rather than lyric because the lesson is illustratively rather than directly stated.

Both the archetypal and the fable-parable myths are present in The Donnellys. Reaney, working from tradition, has incorporated the Aeschylean structure of trilogy and chorus, and the Brechtian prescription of epic theatre for his own purposes of storytelling. Reaney's storytelling reveals the inevitability of the life-death cycle (the archetypal myth); however, the tale also sounds a cautionary note in regard to what happens to a community when evil gets the upper-hand (the parable-fable myth).

To answer the questions posed in the introductory statement is only to clarify the position on which the following discussion is based. Some critics may argue that myth automatically assumes archetype. My position is less categorical: a myth is essentially narrative, likely not truthful; a myth may be didactic or archetypal or both. Dramatic structure which is geared to storytelling complements the mythic content and themes of The Donnellys.

In many respects, Aeschylus' The Oresteian Trilogy and James Reaney's The Donnellys are similarly structured. Both trilogies are based on a community legend that would (or should) be familiar to the audience. The murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and her subsequent murder by Orestes were stories told by Homer.[40] According to Antony Andrewes in his book on Greek society, it was not unusual for a legend which well-illustrated a contemporary problem in Athens to be dramatized. He says:

> Athenian tragedy was very much a projection of the City of Athens, often glancing explicitly at the glory of the

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[39] James Reaney, "Fourteen Barrels from Sea to Sea" (Erin: Press Porcepic), 1977.

[40] This claim is made by several scholars. Edith Hamilton, Mythology (London: New English Libarary, reprinted 1969), p. 21-22. Philip Vellacott, trans. of Aeschylus, The Oresteian Trilogy (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, reprinted 1981), p. 9-36.

> city...The plots, with rare exceptions, were taken from the common stock of legend and concerned princes and their courts: and this meant that the outcome was known in outline before the play began, though the poet [sic] was free to improvise or alter detail.[41]

Edith Hamilton agrees that the account of Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon is told only briefly by Homer and is much embellished by Aeschylus.[42] Reaney, of course, stylistically, makes a great deal of the fact that his additions to the Donnelly legend are based on documentation; however, in truth, he, like Aeschylus, freely changes "facts" for his purposes. Even so, the first significant similarity between The Oresteia and The Donnellys is that neither trilogy is built around an unknown outcome. Both trilogies actually avoid a definitive visual spectacle of catastrophe. Both ask, in effect, "How did this (catastrophe) happen?" rather than "What will happen next?" Indeed, the murders in the Oresteia and the Donnelly murders are related (or narrated) rather than embodied by an event on stage. Apparently, freed from the necessity of relating outcome, both playwrights then chose not to have the main body of the drama superceded by a single violent stage spectacle.

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[41] Antony Andrewes, Greek Society (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, reprinted 1981), p.244.

[42] Edith Hamilton, p. 236.

The next, most obvious, similarity between The Oresteia and The Donnellys is the interesting nature of the trilogy itself. Every section of each trilogy centres around one basic structural event. For Reaney's trilogy, it is the following: the murder of Farl; the murder of Mike Donnelly; the murder of five Donnellys (especially Johanna); and the trial of the vigilantes. For Aeschylus' trilogy, it is the following: the murder of Aegisthus; the murder of Clytemnestra; the trial of Orestes. Simply put, both trilogies are based on an offense (or a sin), a counter offense (another sin), and a resolution (some kind of justice). It is interesting to note that the larger pattern of the trilogy follows the smaller pattern of the chorus, that is, the choral movement: strophe, antistrophe and epode (q.v.).

Of course, mention of the chorus leads to another structural similarily between the trilogies. Significantly, Reaney has "chosen" to use a chorus whereas tradition for Aeschylus almost demanded the use of a chorus because of the relatively young, though magnificent, state of tragedy in ancient Greek society. Not that Aeschylus wasn't an innovator. Although a modern reader does not receive this impression from reading a Greek tragedy, in early Greek plays, only one actor was used. Aeschylus introduced a second actor and later a third actor into his tragedies. The Oxford Companion to the Theatre explains:

> By reducing the size of the chorus and introducing a second actor into the play, [Aeschylus] made the histrionic part as important as the lyric and,... turned oratorio into drama.[43]

Acting in the reverse, yet also as an innovator, Reaney enlarges the chorus and puts the cast as a whole into the position of playing many parts as was the Greek custom. Aeschylus, by moving forward, and Reaney, by stepping back, meet at the same place. And yet, both men are undeniably original and fresh--both seem to be moving away from tradition at the same time as they move toward a common position in use of the chorus.

The choruses of both trilogies serve at least three similar functions. First, as a group, they embody the sentiments of the community. Sometimes naive, other times perceptive or sympathetic, the chorus can suddenly turn with hostility on the protagonists. All in all, the protagonists, Clytemnestra and Orestes, Johanna and Will Donnelly are larger, that is, more daring, more heroic, than the general community membership which is represented by the chorus. The chorus also seems to hold the religious views of the community. For example, in The Oresteia, the chorus appeals variously to Zeus or Apollo or Pallas Athene; in The Donnellys, the chorus chants prayers from the Roman Catholic liturgy. Finally, another function of the chorus shared by both trilogies is purely theatrical device. The use of the chorus eliminates the necessity of scene divisions. No matter how quickly and effectively scene changes occur, they can be often clumsy and intrusive. However, in these trilogies, one scene flows into another by virtue of the ever-changing shape of the chorus. Admittedly, the audience does not have the relief of the blackout and the calm of a scene change. The well-used audience tends, in a Reaney play or a Greek play, to feel totally drained after a performance. No wonder. One only has to look at the variety of sensations it has absorbed without a break to find the explanation.

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[43] The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. by Phyllis Harnoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, reprinted 1981), p.8.

Although the parallels between The Oresteia and The Donnellys do extend beyond the bounds of mere structure, the manner in which these two trilogies lend themselves to comparison is actually remarkable. The importance to both of music and dance, not only as decoration but also as a major leitmotif, is in itself a possibility for examination that limited space here forbids.

One knows by reading the Reaney article in Stage

Voices that Reaney is extremely well-acquainted with classic theatre. Less certain is the extent to which Reaney uses the theories of Bertolt Brecht. Reaney does mention Mother Courage and alienation effects in Hamlet but I am going to confine my interest in Brecht to his prescriptive theories on epic theatre and how they apply to the didactic element in Reaney's trilogy.

Questions about the rightness or wrongness of prescriptive theories have no practical significance for Brecht who cheerfully and precisely defines the difference between "Dramatic" and "Epic" form.[44] While one must be reminded that theories are not indeed plays, nevertheless, when one looks closely at what Brecht is saying and at what he is trying to accomplish in terms of theatrical experience, one can see why he is the man who appears to offer a link between Aeschylus and Reaney. Again, no conclusions can be reached about whether or not Reaney has consciously turned toward Brechtian epic theatre. (In fact, Thornton Wilder, whom Reaney mentions in Stage Voices, may be a better touchstone for Reaney than is Brecht.) No matter how significant Brecht is to Reaney, the fact remains that Brecht wants to use the theatre to inform and instruct audiences; and, he wants to move audiences to the political left.

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[44] Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Learning (1957)", in European Theories of the Drama, ed. by Barrett H. Clark, newly revised by Henry Papkin (New York: Crown Publishers, fourth printing, 1969), p. 309.

Brecht appears to be one of the playwrights at the forefront of a contemporary movement which experiments with dramatic structure in order to attack social problems. Because of his successful plays, he is influential; because of his written comments about the role of the theatre in society, he is not only accessible but also important to other playwrights who wish to follow his course. (Brecht was not the only playwright to experiment with structure; in America, Thornton Wilder was finding new ways to narrate his stories.[45]) Even so, using the theatre as an instrument of social change is not an idea exclusive to Brecht as he himself well knows. Brecht points out that medieval drama was conceived in a manner which would both inform and instruct. He notes:

> From the standpoint of style [form], the epic of theatre is nothing especially new. In its character of show, of demonstration, and its emphasis on the artistic, it is related to the ancient Asian theatre. The medieval mystery play, and also the

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[45] Wilder experimented with structure when he introduced a narrator in Our Town and actress/character "Sabina" in The Skin of Our Teeth. He also wrote, sans chorus, a trilogy based on Greek mythology, The Alcestiad.

> classic Spanish and Jesuit theatres, showed an instructive tendency.[46]

Although the "instructive tendency" of epic theatre greatly influences the form of Brecht's drama, he is not alone in showing a socialist's concern with community problems. These concerns are intrinsic to the drama of two of Brecht's predessessors, Ibsen and Shaw.[47] In fact, Shaw is of the opinion that the dramatist sometimes has a moral duty to put aside his concern for great and lasting drama (universal, life-as-it-is, drama) in order to address pressing social questions of the day. He says:

> If people are rotting and starving in all directions, and nobody else has the heart or the brains to make a disturbance about it, the great writers must.[48]

Shaw may appear rather conventional to an audience in 1980, but his interest in social questions made his plays controversial when they were first produced.[49]

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[46] Brecht, p. 312.

[47] Perhaps content and style (diction and imagery) were more noticably innovative than was structure in the drama of Ibsen and Shaw.

[48] George Bernard Shaw, in an article, "The Problem Play" (1895), European Theories of the Drama, p. 446.

[49] Reaney notes (in his article, "Your Plays are like Movies - Cinemascope ones", p. 35) that G. B. Shaw writes plays where "bourgeois materialist reality is left

It would seem, philosophically anyway, that extending as far back as the middle ages up to the so-called modern period--from the mystery plays to Shaw to Brecht to Reaney--there exists a pervasive didactic urge among western playwrights. Although each era of writers is inclined to think of itself as the first and only group to show social consciousness, there is actually a strong, generally left-leaning, reform-minded tradition in the theatre. And lately (within the past hundred years or so) the social concerns of the playwrights are reflected in their interest in the form as well as the content of twentieth century drama.

According to Brecht, the "dramatic" structure of a play must be changed when a play deals with social issues if the playwright intends to try to change society. Therefore, instead of making an audience feel, "yes, life is like that", the epic dramatist wants the playgoers to become informed about aspects of society which need to be, and can be, improved. That is the reason why Brecht differentiates between drama where "the stage 'incarnates' an event" and drama which "relates" an event. In the latter case, the emphasis has shifted from imitating

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intact." It is an understatement to say that Shaw would be made contemptuous by such a remark.

reality to telling a story. Brecht equates the function of the ancient chorus as an aid to narration with the character of modern-day film. He claims the chorus was used in Greek drama as an instrument of narration which (among other things) "informed the audience about facts it did not know".[50] (Here it is important to note that no matter how many facts a chorus relates to the audience, the chorus does not possess the interpretative ability of that audience). Like a camera, the chorus records-without-wisdom in order to serve, in the play as a whole, a greater function than a mere purveyor of information. It is Brecht's belief that if a playwright desires to instruct his audience he can (with the help of science) use "chorus-type" devices such as film, puppets, even car headlights [51] as part of the stagecraft. Perhaps Reaney does not use the headlights, but he does use the chorus, slide pictures, puppets, ladders, barrels, and clotheslines for the purpose of telling his story.

In many respects, Reaney's The Donnellys shares a structural similarity with what Brecht describes as "epic" theatre. Aside from his desire that a story should be related and information be given to the audience, Brecht refers to epic in the Aristotelian sense. Aristotle separated dramatic, epic, and lyric. Epic poetry is characterized by its construction which is series of episodes. Brecht, saying that the same construction should apply to epic theatre, states:

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[50] Brecht, p. 309.

[51] Bentley, p. 56. Any device that showed an audience that it was watching actors, not real people, was of interest to Brecht.

> The epic writer, Doblin, gave an excellent description when he said that the epic, in contrast to the dramatic, could practically be cut up with scissors into single pieces, each of which could stand alone.[52]

Reaney's plays are episodic according to the manner in which Brecht defines the term. Each episode (which Reaney calls a sequence) in the trilogy has its own dramatic nature which allows it to stand alone. Many of the small pieces into which the trilogy could be divided are structured like cameos or vignettes which make pointed reference to institutions (the politics of the church), to government (the rigidity of the surveyors' task), or to people (the smugness of Miss Maguire).[53] The episodic nature of each play in The Donnellys does not lessen the impact of the character of the trilogy. In fact, it seems almost as if Reaney could or would have written his three plays the way he did, with or without Bertolt Brecht, so comfortable is the episodic structure of the trilogy with the story of Donnelly family. Brecht is of interest, however, because he is one of the few playwrights who would disagree with the main premise of Poetics: the cause-effect plot structure.

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[52] Brecht, p. 308.

[53] The thematic ramifications of instruction are discussed in Chapter 4.

One cannot imagine exactly how far one would get, or how profitable the journey would be, if one were to compare the drama of Brecht and Reaney. The greatest difference between the two playwrights may lie in the manner in which the protagonists are characterized. For example, Mother Courage and Johanna Donnelly spring from two different traditions. Yet on a purely prescriptive basis, particularly regarding structure, Reaney does appear to follow the many of the tenets of epic theatre.

Epic theatre produces a type of tragedy which is structurally different from Sophoclean or Renaissance tragedy which is conceptualized on Aristotelian premises. If one were asked if Hamlet or King Lear or even Oedipus Tyrannus appears to display those qualities of epic structure which have been described, one would likely answer that they do not. In each of the above Shakespearean tragedies, the catastrophe occurs as the result of a linear, though intricate, plotline--all events are arranged in a more or less pyramid shape. The catastrophe happens on stage after a climax or point of no return has been reached by the protagonist. Documentation and narration are not as important as dramatic monologue; instruction is not intended to be as powerful as the feeling of veracity--"this is the way men behave". A Shakespearean play has numerous scene changes. The number of scenes in one act of Hamlet may quantitatively correspond to the number of sequences in an act of Handcuffs; however, the scenes in Hamlet are not held together by a chorus the way they are in Handcuffs. There are definite, even if brief, breaks in Shakespeare. Moreover, each scene in Hamlet contributes to the formal plot complication; each sequence in Handcuffs complicates the plot. No comment can be made in this very brief analysis as to how or if Reaney has been influenced by Shakespearean drama. Superficially, however, Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys, appears not to share many of the structural principles inherent in Shakespearean tragedy.[54]

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[54] It is necessary to re-iterate that the structure to which this discussion is directed does not include elements of style (poetic language, lack of formal set design), elements that may provide a better ground for comparison between Reaney and Shakespeare. Also, one should hasten to add, that structural differences in the drama of the two playwrights do not imply a qualitative conclusion.

One answer to the question of why Reaney chose episodes instead of a continuous cause-effect linear plotline may lie in the reason suggested earlier. Reaney, unlike Shakespeare, wants to clearly make a social point about conflict in the community. The story itself is intended to make the point (not the character as in Shakespeare's Hamlet); therefore, the re-incarnation of catastrophe for the stage is not as important as the explanation behind the catastrophe.

This chapter concludes with the observation that much is omitted which should be discussed in a helpful comparative study. Also, the structure of The Donnellys, because of its complex nature, deserves a great deal of scholarly attention; only a small beginning was made here. The most important point that this chapter makes lies not so much in the opinions which are given herein, but in the fact that there can and ought to be more opinions on dramatic structure. Admittedly, it is often a struggle to untangle structure and style. Nevertheless, since the arrangement of events is often at the root of a play's impact (or its failure), the structure is the place to begin analysis of a play.

3

Style

I. Introduction

Because a play is more than structure, just as an object is more than the lines and curves of a blueprint, an understanding of the constituents of the dramatic form of The Donnellys is not complete without analysis of the style of the trilogy. In the following chapter, the theatrical and literary aspects of dramatic style will be discussed in relation to: properties, music and dance, and dialogue. Since, in its totality, dramatic style involves the manner in which events are presented (as opposed to the order and arrangement of events), the final section of this chapter will deal with Reaney's use of traditional styles--one European, and one Canadian. The melodramatic and docudramatic styles of presentation complement both the archetypes and the fable-parables in the story as Reaney tells it. The undivided psyches of the protagonists (characters are wholly good or wholly evil), as found in melodrama and docudrama, suit the requirements of Reaney's purpose. By making characters larger than life (more good or more evil), he exploits the legend for the sake of giving his community its own myth.

I. Dramatic style: theatrical and literary

Sometimes, the style of a work of art may be predicated by purpose. How public does the artist intend his effort to be? As an artist, the playwright is perfectly clear on this score. A play, by its very nature, is a public piece; it obviously is written with communication in mind and depends, for its success as a play (unless a closet drama), on a public performance. Details which may be obfuscated in a novel or poem must be fairly obvious in a play. The public may want laughter, tears, comedy and tragedy from live theatre; but, the play makes its own demands on the public as well. Therefore, at the same time as playgoers are remembering the order of events as they occur on stage, their communal eye-ear is also recording both information and sensation based on what is seen (setting, props, costume, lights, and last-but not least-actors) and what is heard (dialogue, music, general stage noise). For the purpose of the following discussion, the manner in which the structure is presented, i.e what is seen and what is heard, will be called, "dramatic style". Both the literary portion of a drama, or that which is determined by the playwright, plus the theatrical dimension of a drama, that which is the concern of the director, combine to make up the dramatic style. The Reaney trilogy is much more detailed regarding stage directions and stage properties than most plays. However, it is still possible to speculate on the various theatrical ways that the trilogy may be staged. But, because Reaney's instructions are fully intended to reinforce theme and content, in the final analysis, properties and music will be treated as organic components of the dramatic style. Both the theatrical and literary purposes of the properties and the music will be discussed.

The style of a play not only provides colour but also carries with it a responsibility. More than any other art form, a play demands a contract between the audience and all the members of the production (actors, director and crew). If it were written, the contract would state something to the effect that from the minute the audience steps into the theatre and agrees to give its collective, undivided attention to the stage, every opportunity should be taken to defer to this commitment. No action, no word, no prop should be gratuitous. Since limited time and energy are the helpful enemies of both actor and audience, there always must be an atmosphere of deliberation enveloping the performance.[1] Sticks and Stones, The St.

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[1] Deliberation here does not mean "slowness" or "heaviness". Deliberation is used to indicate, quite simply, that cast and crew should know what they are doing. Any uncertain gesture, or any speech which rambles, or any deed which appears unmotivated, attacks the "deliberateness" of the drama.

Nicholas Hotel and Handcuffs, the three plays in Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys, respect this unwritten contract, as well as stretch the convention (not to indulge in gratuity) to the limit.

Right from the outset of each play Reaney, the dramaturgist, works fast, but fair. He does not wait until the end of Act I or the middle of Act II to let his audience know that the scenerio it is viewing is not actually making the slightest pretense of being "real life", or, naturalistic theatre. Reaney calls the opening set for Sticks and Stones "a room" where the story is presented. In this room is contained "all of the objects and properties required - ladders, barrels, sticks, stones, noise-makers." The stage is set in The St. Nicholas Hotel as a barroom and a waiting room. Actors are spinning tops and "singing songs from the play". A road goes through the middle of the barroom-cum-waiting room and around "all the walls of the theatre" extends a map. And finally, the play entitled Handcuffs opens "on a bare stage dominated by a large sideboard or buffet." Under Reaney's direction all three plays, by avoiding what may be mistaken for a realistic set, and by making the props not only visible but a part of the little set that there is, have respected the integrity of the audience by sending a signal. The signal is: "this is play," not "this is life." Reaney wants the style of these productions, apparent to the audience before even a word has been spoken, to suggest the length to which the playwright eventually will push the anti-illusory nature of the trilogy.

However, stage directions are only aids to a production. Therefore, the anti-illusionary nature of the three plays is rather more of a theatrical style than a concrete and formal design.[2] That is to say, it would be possible, however unlikely (or however false to the intention of the drama), to ignore stage directions. One could re-enact each play of the trilogy on a proscenium stage before a backdrop of several mini-sets.[3] Each set could depict one facet of life in Biddulph. For Sticks and Stones there could be: the church set, the rural set, the legal and government set. The chorus (a fixed structural device) could pick the sticks off bushes and the stones off the road as if they were "real" people in the community. No one can judge in advance the potential success of a production, but the fact that the possibility exists for another dramatic interpretation of The Donnellys proves that a certain part of the dramatic style, and that is the theatric presentation--the appearance and use of the set, properties, costumes and lights--can never be determined absolutely by the text.

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[2] An interesting point of comparison would be Michael Cook's, Jacob's Wake. Cook offers two kinds of staging, naturalistic and expressionistic.

[3] Rod Langley's Bethune performed at the Citadel Theatre, Edmonton, was a mammoth undertaking because the play had 29 scene changes. The problem was solved by mini-sets.

Although some aspects of the dramatic style of the individual performance cannot be guaranteed, the actual words and dialogue allowed to the characters--depending on the reliability of an actor's memory--is fixed. Therefore, the way the characters speak gives the play both another dimension of theatrical purpose as well as a literary quality. It would seem, then, that the theatrical style of a play is extraordinarily complex because it bears the mark of the director and the actor as well as the playwright. Theatrics, however, vary from production to production. But the literary style of the drama, a style which is as intricate as the poet's own imagination, is as much of a solid presence as the structure of the trilogy. Both the theatrical possibilities and the literary style of Sticks and Stones, St. Nicholas Hotel, and Handcuffs deserve attention.

a. Properties

The theatrical possibilities of The Donnellys are carefully outlined in stage notes written by the playwright who, to give him complete credit, has worked out every move during the writing process with his company of players.[4] Stressing the importance of "play" with all the connotations of the word, Reaney and "the players" took simple articles of "play" and turned these articles into metaphors. Thus, the sticks, a group of people named after the tools they carry, wave their toys as instruments of terror. People and tools have become, in a reverse symbolic gesture, the personification of the proverb: "Sticks and Stones".[5] The stones behave more defensively than the sticks and fairly soon their affiliation with the Donnellys becomes clear. The stones inevitably take the Catholic side in the argument; the stones are the kids in Sticks and Stones, Act I, who defend the Donnelly honour when Mr. Fat insults their home. The exchange between them goes as follows:

> Mr. Fat
> If you can call it a shanty

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[4] For example, see "An Interview with David Ferry" Nov. 23, 1979. Reaney would come in each day to the workshop with some written script as well as some ideas he wanted to explore. Depending on what he and the group found about actions and ideas that worked, or did not, Reaney kept or rewrote the script accordingly. (Permission to quote from this interview was given by Moira Day.)

[5] Realizing that language is itself a symbol, one can see how the cyclical movement of object-symbolized-by-word-symbolized-by-object is completed by this image.

Kids (Stones)
It's not a shanty its a house
...

Farl
But how will they know in this settlement you've come to who the real blackfeet are. Mike, there's other ways than pulling it down.
Jim here's so nimble on his feet, take the old axe to it.

Kids (Stones)
Your axe isn't half sharp enough, mister.[6]

The positive quality of the stones is re-iterated on many occasions but never more forcefully than in Handcuffs at the conclusion when the chorus points to "'four stones where there once was a house/home.'" Pat Donnelly places a stone on the stage as if it were a gravemarker for his brother. Bob Donnelly kisses another stone, as if it were his father's heart, then places it--another marker--on the stage. By the end of the trilogy, stones exist as an evocative device in their own right and do not need to be attached to one of the different factions of the community to have meaning for the audience.

Sticks, although at first associated in human terms with Protestants who are for the most part enemies of the Donnellys, have a positive side as well as a negative one. Sticks, when they are not associated with a group, become a metaphor for Will's fiddle; a stick is a bone that Theresa keeps in a box on her buffet--the remains of Mrs. Donnelly's arm. Furthermore, the bone is likened to the wing of a bird. When Reaney in Stage Voices talks about the extent to which a playwright can develop theatrical metaphor, he says:

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[6] Sticks and Stones, p. 75 and 76.

> I can remember thinking that Cocteau is right when he says that theatrical metaphor is like lace; when the big reading image of Richard III came up--bluebottle, spider in a bottle, or whatever--it just whizzed by in a second, hardly noticed.[7] On the page, I used to linger over it.

The theatrical filigree that Reaney creates is spun from two, rather humble, prop groups which are seen lying innocently on the stage before the play begins. The sticks and the stones at first are no more than an ironic reminder that, as weapons, they do in fact hurt more than names. Even so, without a human arm attached to them, both sticks and stones are merely objects. They are neutral: neither good nor bad in their associations. Only the playwright's imagination can make these plain objects into a creative design which can be called "theatrical lace".

The theatrical lace, so nicely established in

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[7] Stage Voices, p. 144.

Sticks and Stones by the sticks, stones, ladders (and even the physical presence of fire), is not nearly as extensively recorded in the stage directions of St. Nicholas Hotel. The opening notes indicate that the actors should be "spinning tops". One might guess that the players may make their moving tops battle with each other to suggest the nature of the competition and the race between the owners of the different stagecoach lines.[8] The top image appears to function for the St. Nicholas Hotel in the way in which sticks and stones make the pattern for Part I. In Act III of the middle play, members of the chorus, who ask many questions that are not answered, become so confused that they start to spin. Stage notes indicate, "The three mystery faces whip [the chorus] like tops humming."[9] The chorus at this point personifies the toy. But, the top is always itself, not a fiddle or a weapon; the top does not take sides. Indeed, one cannot be certain if this middle play suffers because it lacks the polemical nature set up by the sticks and stones of the previous plays. Sticks and stones may be used to represent two sides of the argument, whereas one top is much like the next, unless a director wants to colour "good" tops, red, and "bad" tops, blue--or some similar effect. Possibly, the lack of polemics may show the resignation of both the community and the Donnellys to the differences that divide them. Therefore, both sides, having decided to compete in the race for survival, spin like tops to the finish line.[10] Whatever the interpretation, in this play, the metaphor is less clear than before, even if a top is not less effective theatrically than "sticks and stones".[11]

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[8] St. Nicholas Hotel, Act I, sequence 1, pp. 17-23.

[9] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 134.

In the St. Nicholas Hotel there is no reason to suppose that some props could not be carried over from the first play. For example, the rows of chairs on either side of the stage seem consistent in each set. Even so, Reaney has pulled back somewhat from giving explicit instructions. The stage directions of this play do not actually specify the use of ladders, although such a prop could be used to indicate roads and heights in a manner similar to the way ladders are used in the preceding play. The stick fiddle is important[12] and so are the four poles which represent the four-poster bed that Mike is laid on. At one point, Minister Donaldson enters carrying a block of ice which Will puts in a pail. The directions tell us that we watch the ice melt throughout the play until the maid uses the water to scrub away Mike Donnelly's blood at the end of the play. The melting ice is a metaphor comparing the dissolving process with the passage of time. The fact that the water from the ice cannot remove the stain of Mike's blood is a symbol which stands for the idea that events in time are fixed.

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[10] The spinning tops are used at the conclusion of St. Nicholas Hotel by Mike and Greenwood who twirl the objects in a way which suggests that they "fight each other." p. 149

[11] See Mary Jane Miller "The Use of Stage Metaphor in The Donnellys," Canadian Drama (Vol. 8, no. 1, 1982), p. 34.

A metaphor sets up a comparison between two dissimilar objects. A symbol, however, suggests that an object is turned from its ordinary meaning into a larger idea. A metaphor, used frequently and variously, eventually becomes expanded into symbolic meaning; but, a metaphor does not have to be symbolic. In the trilogy, sticks and stones are extensively used metaphorically. Thus, when a stick becomes a fiddle or a sword, the comparison is at first, metaphor; but, when the stick, sword and fiddle symbolize flexibility, ingenuity and indomitability, the metaphorical aspect of object has been transcended into idea (symbol), and a web of rich literary tropes has been spun. Since tops do not proceed through the metaphorical to the symbolic, but become symbolic immediately (spinning tops symbolize frustration and lack of forward progress), their literary richness is not as intricate as sticks, stones or curtains. However, there is no way that one can make a definitive judgment about the quality of the style of some future or hypothetical production of the St. Nicholas Hotel. Therefore, a top may be just as effective theatrically, as a stick or a stone.

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[12] For example, Will plays "Boney over the Alps" to chase away the mob, p. 146.

In Part III, Handcuffs, there is a re-assertion by the playwright of the importance of metaphor. Once again Reaney introduces the idea that objects can become other objects (again, tops can "race" or "fight" or symbolize confusion and frustration; but, they really never become something other than tops). In Handcuffs, a stick becomes a bone becomes a bird's wing becomes a fiddle; a curtain becomes a veil becomes a wall becomes a shroud; a step ladder becomes a road becomes a gibbet becomes an alter; a shirt on a clothesline is a man is a corpse.[13]

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[13] Because of space limitations, I shall refrain from giving the detailed evidence that this interesting

The metaphorical use of objects,the level of which seems to take a dip in Part II, is back as a dominating effect in Handcuffs.[14]

By using "play" as his inspiration, Reaney bases the dramatic style of The Donnellys upon the flexibility of objects and on the chorus' ability to work the stage properties. Accordingly, their peculiar anti-illusionary theatrical style does dominate the presentation of the trilogy. But as the fashion of the clothes should suit the wearer, the use of the properties, costumes, and lights should suit the production. Each cast and crew will (and should) give a distinctive interpretation to their production. Therefore, while the sticks, stones, tops, curtains and barrels are the major prescribed props of the plays, comments about their dramatic effectiveness tend to be a literary rather than a theatrical evaluation.

b. Music and Dance

If there are variables surrounding the effective dramatic use of the properties (costumes and lighting are

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phenomenon deserves.

[14] The handcuffs of Part III are used similarly to the tops of Part II. Handcuffs symbolize the closing of a trap that can only contain the physical not the spiritual person. Like tops, handcuffs never become another physical object.

included as "variables"), the music and dance of the plays may be more easily categorized and analyzed as a stylistic device with a predictable dramatic response.

As mentioned in Chapter One, all three plays in the trilogy begin with music. In a structural sense, the music functions as a leitmotif within the drama itself. However, the style of the music that Reaney chooses has certain characteristics of its own. Therefore, the peculiar style of the "John Barleycorn" ballad or the "Haymaker's Reel" brings its own dramatic effect to the trilogy, an effect which the playwright fully exploits.

The intrinsic nature of the ballad, for instance, makes its use a natural choice for a play which has a chorus. Since some of the ballad characteristics are specific and distinct, it may be fairly safe to generalize on how the character of the chorus suits the nature of the ballad genre. The balladeer, like the chorus, relates the details of a story; and, because this story is often based on an oral rather than a written legend or folk tale, emphatic repetition of a phrase is usually the case. In the ballad of "John Barleycorn", the singers repeat a refrain in the song itself ("Tiree igery ary ann, Tiree igery ee/Tiree igery ary ann, the barley grain for me"), just as the chorus repeats the verses of the ballad to emphasize the action of the play. Furthermore, since the ballad style appears to suit the general form of the play by virtue of the chorus, their compatability may be because of the communal nature of both. Although ballads were most likely composed by individuals, the ballad itself traditionally adopts the point-of-view of the community[15] in much the same way that the chorus embodies the different feelings and attitudes among the people of Biddulph. Perhaps it is because both are pre-literate forms that the chorus and the ballad appear to share some characteristics. In any case, the style of this traditional rural Irish ballad seems the perfect choice to complement the choral structure of the Donnellys.

Although as its title suggests, "John Barleycorn", with its a b c b rhyme scheme and its repeated refrain, is written in the ballad form, the language of the ballad suggests a riddle. Like the familiar "Humpty Dumpty" nursery riddle-rhyme in which an egg is personified, the barleygrain is personified and furthermore, in Reaney's use of it, the grain alludes to the Donnellys themselves. Consistent with Reaney's idea of "play", riddles are perceived by most people to be verbal games for children. But it was not always so. Riddles, like ballads, probably date back in their earliest form to a pre-literate culture. Several scholarly sources refer to the magical properties that riddles held for primitive people who chanted conundrums at weddings, funerals and harvest time.[16] On these occasions, solving the riddle appeared to be a symbolic method of solving problems. The riddle posed by the Barleycorn ballad implicitly asks how will John Barleycorn (the barleygrain), after being beaten and pounded to death, come back to life? Of course there is an answer provided for the Donnellys by the course of events; nevertheless, it is this technique of posing questions that turns into a catechism for Will and Jennie. The riddle form is important to the children who have many questions to ask of the people in Biddulph. For example, the children want to know "why is our father's farm so narrow?" Also, Will asks "Why am I a cripple?" As well, the harvest imagery in the ballad of "John Barleycorn" may evoke the subliminal "primitive" memory of people who hope that by solving riddles, they may solve their problems.

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[15] For the purposes of this paper, I am going to assume that some characteristics of the folk ballad may be seen as constants. This assumption is not intended to minimize the complexity and diversity of the ballad form.

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[16] For example, see Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New York: Atheneum Press, originally published by Princeton University Press, 1957, fifth printing, 1967) p. 81, 280, 300.; and, William S. Baring-Gould and Ceil Baring-Gould, The Annotated Mother Goose (Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1967) p. 267-287.

Perhaps, the Donnelly children hope that by the very process of asking the question, they will automatically receive an answer. The ballad of "John Barleycorn" provides the strongest imagery and most complex evocation of all the musical sounds used in the first play. Because it contains both words and music and it uses parallel structure and repeated refrain, also because of the personification, rural imagery and the riddle, the ballad complements the structure of the trilogy, especially, Part I.

If the words and music of the ballad of "John Barleycorn" are stylistically relevant to the plays as a whole by virtue of the comparison between the choral and the ballad form, then something similar may be said about the use of: "St. Patrick", "Hector O'Hara's Jubilee Song", and "Buffalo Gals" in the _St. Nicholas Hotel_. Of the three plays in the trilogy, the style of the _St. Nicholas Hotel_ comes closest to the style of late Victorian melodrama.[17] The word, melodrama, originally meant, music-drama; but, over the years this term has assumed a connotation of "the sensational, violent and extravagantly emotional".[18] The melodrama employs "language or behaviour or occurrence suggestive of a [sensational dramatic piece.]"[19] The sensational event performed before a musical backdrop is present in all the plays of the trilogy; but, the "sound" of galloping horses, shooting, and especially the rapid, fast-moving, close rhyming, jig ("St. Patrick" is sung to the tune of "Pop Goes the Weasel") and the maudlin gaiety of the dancehall number ("Buffalo Gals" (q.v.)) signal melodrama. If the musical signals are correct, then the gothic and sentimental characteristics of melodrama, that is, the exaggeration of the grotesque and mysterious, popular in Britain and America at the end of the nineteenth century, should turn up in Part II of the trilogy.[20]

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[17] The travelling medicine show in _Sticks and Stones_, Act I, is a melodrama specifically written to exaggerate and sensationalize the Donnelly legend. By allowing the "true" Mr. Donnelly to argue with the "false" Mr. Donnelly, Reaney is able to clarify (rectify) some of the facts in Thomas Kelly's book, _The Black Donnellys_. (con'd)

Indeed, sentimental characteristics of melodrama are present in abundance in the St. Nicholas Hotel. The impact of Maggie's death has been discussed in Chapter One.

However, this melodramatic "play within a play" does not make the overall style of Part I as melodramatic as the style of Part II.

[18] Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language.

[19] The Concise Oxford Dictionary, new edition.

[20] See, for example, David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 1-22.

The playgoer is watching pure melodrama at work in the remove when Maggie dies from passion unfulfilled in a convent where she has been placed by her father. Maggie's father is straight from the tradition of melodrama's heartless villains. He is a "croo-ell and evilll tyrant" who has forbidden Maggie's marriage to Will on outrageously bigotted grounds. Her father cries:

> But all Souls' Day doesn't change the spots on Cripple, he's a cripple and no girl of mine's of age who's thinking of marrying that Cripple. I'd rather see you going to your grave.[21]

Remarks such as the above make an audience want to hiss.

Other characters in the St. Nicholas Hotel who are nasty enough to evoke the collective verbal disapproval of the audience are George Stub and his fiance, Miss Maguire. Miss Maguire firmly insists on a marriage contract that would make a good man wince. Fortunately, George Stub,[22] Justice of the Peace, a man who takes part in pro-Protestant, anti-Catholic demonstrations with no legal recrimination, deserves Miss Maguire. Even so, her marriage demands are so pre-emptory, they should "get a laugh" from the audience. She tells Stub:

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[21] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 49.

[22] When Dr. Maguire asks Stub, "How many faces of the poor did you grind in the main street..." one is reminded of that other nasty capitalist, Mr. Gradgrind, who is the villain of Dickens', Hard Times.

> Then that's the rules. It's some day to be Senator Stub, or else. I have depths of meanness, George. Don't ruffle them.[23]

Indeed, "depths of meanness" are melodramatic; but then, in terms of exaggerated effect, nothing can surpass the raw emotion of the poor, frightened and quaking child who is homeless. This unfortunate child, Tom Ryan, turns to the audience and says:

> ...Tom Ryan is my name, this is my Pa, here's my Ma and a couple of my sisters. What are we doing? We are all waiting one cold morning for Pa--to get his rump of a chest that contains bread, cheese, tea and other necessaries of life which he refuses to let us have.[24]

And later, Tom adds:

> Don't hit me Pa. I was only.[sic] I will go and I will never come back, and I stepped out onto the road and looked in the snow [sic] for somebody to take me in: Who will take in the barefoot Ryan
> Boy?[25]

Can one imagine the "yay" that must get caught in its collective throat when the audience hears the name, "Donnelly"! Then the chorus says, "Yes, the Donnellys took him in." After playing such a scene, Tom Ryan joins the shivering ranks occupied by the little matchgirl, Tiny Tim, and all the other cold and homeless children in literature and drama who bring us close to tears.

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[23] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 38.

[24] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 73.

[25] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 73.

The melodramatic sequences in the St. Nicholas Hotel offer a variety of heightened emotional responses. Some episodes are humorous (Maguire and Stub); some are pathetic (Maggie); and, some are nearly maudlin (Tom Ryan).[26] But the term, melodrama, and the description of this play as, melodramatic, do not necessarily imply failed tragedy. James L. Smith concurs. In the chapter on "Defeat" in his book, Melodrama, Smith says:

> ...Critics who stress the fatalism of Romeo and Juliet usually conclude the play a tragedy which fails; they would judge it very differently as a melodrama of defeat. This is not to say that Shakespeare missed the marathon and won the egg-and-spoon race. Melodrama is not inferior to tragedy; it works by different means to different ends, and comparisons are only valid when they lie within the genre.[27]

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[26] These are only a few examples showing the melodramatic nature of the play.

[27] James L. Smith, (Melodrama: The Critical Idiom Series) London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1973), p. 65.

Melodrama, by working "different means to different ends" can be as powerful a force as tragedy.[28] The sequence (near the conclusion of Act III of the St. Nicholas Hotel), when the mob approaches the Donnellys' farm looking for Mary Donovan's cow, is both frightening and prophetic. The mob wants to attack the family and needs only the slightest pretense of wrong-doing to motivate it. For a moment the tension builds as the audience wonders if this will be the actual deed. Will this threat from the vigilantes turn into the massacre the audience has heard about? But no, Will's fiddle-playing disperses the mob: this time. Elements of the melodramatic run all through the trilogy; but, the best examples of the technique are found in the St. Nicholas Hotel.

In many ways, the playwright's presentation of Handcuffs re-iterates the ballad and melodramatic styles apparent in Part I and II of the trilogy. But Part III has its own distinctive style as well. Just as the use of a few repeated verses of "John Barleycorn" both underlines the text and emphasizes the rural imagery of Sticks and Stones and, just as the use of the fast-moving jig compliments the wild nature of the stagecoach ride (common to Western melodrama), so the reels and the schottische point the way in Handcuffs. As the title suggests, events are closing in on the family; the tight gyroscopic structure that Reaney uses in each play becomes most evident here. In Act II when Mrs. Donnelly says, "Yes Theresa, this is not a pretty way we are used," Reaney's stage notes interrupt the speech to make an important observation about this scene (which has been repeated verbatim from Act I). Reaney says:

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[28] Tragedies, such as Oedipus Rex, Hamlet and Macbeth explore the psychology of the hero. Melodrama, on the other hand, puts the defenseless and the innocent victims of fate in the hostile company of villains. Sociological implications of melodrama are discussed in Chapter Four.

> The audience should now begin to grasp the structure of the play and experience a "double" feeling about the next events. The sewing machine sound should help us transfer our mind back to the earlier shebeen scenes.[29]

The "structure of [this] play" which the audience "should now begin to grasp" has been present throughout the trilogy. However, this is the first time that the style of a dance (instead of a song) complements the design. Reaney makes dance, especially the reel and schottische, a metaphor for handcuffs and, in turn, handcuffs are a metaphorical description of the structure. As players circle on the stage performing the prescribed steps of their dance routine, they become handcuffs in much the same manner that the people who earlier carried the sticks, became sticks. Only the uplifted arms of Mrs. Donnelly indicate that being caught by the handcuffs will not prevent the spirit of the Donnelly family from raising itself beyond the grasp of material containment and restraint. Mrs. Donnelly's uplifted arms warn us not to be surprised at any transcendental outcome and indeed the final scene of the trilogy refers to the way the actors "mime the growth of a wheatfield". The newly grown wheatfield is a dramatic enactment of the indomitability of the Donnelly spirit which cannot be handcuffed.

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[29] Handcuffs, p. 101. If, on the other hand, the audience does not grasp the structural design, can one blame the audience? The fault in such a case may lie with either the playwright or the director.

Although it should not be forgotten that while some arm-gestures are aimed heavenward, most of the patterns have to do with the feet making a circular design. The dance circle, formed by the reel or schottische, attests to the never-ending cyclicality of the seasons. When the magic curtain is added to the circular pattern,[30] the ritualized dance in Handcuffs almost transforms the drama into a primitive ballet.

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[30] Both the sound and function of the machine (used by Peggy to make the curtain) can be regarded as a fantastical modern metaphor for the three Fates who spun, qualified, and cut the thread of life.

As in a ballet, the movement of the actor-dancers in Handcuffs must be precise in order to maintain some semblance of visual focus. Instead of executing a graceful pirouette, the choral dancers in Part III of the trilogy stamp and clap. In one scene, Peggy cries, "Those that love them clap those that hate them stamp."[31] Just before her cry the sewing machine has been whirring. After her cry, the chorus claps and stamps and in the midst of the activity and the chanting, five dead people (eyes bandaged) appear like shadows from behind the curtain. Then, as if he were a player in a child's musical game, William Donnelly goes "in and out of the clapping and stamping".[32] Will, who is responding to the choral taunts of "Cripple, hey, Cripple", as well as the chorus who is chanting and teasing, must have their movements choreographed in order to keep the frenzy of the scene from descending into chaos.

The fine line which divides acceptable focus and the descent into chaos must constantly be defined and re-defined in the trilogy, The Donnellys. In retrospect, it seems safe to say: Sticks and Stones is styled like a folk play with imagery based upon the pioneer nature of the community and the political nature of the church; the St. Nicholas Hotel is a "horse-opera", and a fast-paced melodrama with a more "urban" core than Part I; finally, Handcuffs is presented like a dream/nightmare, a dance of madness and transcendence. Even though the dramatic style of each play has its own peculiarity, nevertheless, all three parts of the trilogy bear the stamp of what Reaney thinks good theatre should do and should be.

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[31] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 38.

[32] Ibid, p. 39.

c. Language of the Dialogue

While properties, music and dance, all leave an imprint on the individual parts of the trilogy, the spoken language unifies the trilogy at the same time as it asserts the distinctiveness of each play. The structural divisions, referred to in Chapter 1, centre around offense, counter-offense, and trial; the stylistic divisions appear to be related to an archetypal view of morality and are presented metaphorically by using the rites of the Roman Catholic church.

Western civilization has long been familiar with two separate concepts of morality: good and evil. In other words evil is more than just absence of good; it is a force in its own right. We recognize the king of the domain of good is God and king of the domain of evil is the devil. Celebrations honoring God are holy while their opposite number, celebrations honouring the devil, are generally preceded by the label black, such as a "black mass". Reaney's chorus chants part of the Roman Catholic Communion Service and it adopts a stance that is both ironic and sincere. When the pose is sincere the sacraments are holy; when the pose is ironic, the sacraments are black. Whether the sacraments are given a "black" or "white" interpretation, the trilogy appears to be based on the three Roman Catholic sacraments "that can be received only once", namely: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders.[33] These three ceremonies for the Donnellys represent the true rites of the Church. Not so for the community at large. For them the sacraments are black, or more preferably, tainted. But either way, tainted or holy, it seems that Sticks and Stones is fashioned as the Baptism and subsequent catechism; The St. Nicholas Hotel is the Confirmation; and Handcuffs represents the taking of Holy Orders.

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[33] Richard Perkyns, Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique (vol. 3 no. 2. Autumn 1977), in an article entitled "The Innocence of the Donnellys: James Reaney's Three Ring Circus", repeats the claim made by Tom Inkster that "where Sticks and Stones was conceived as a catechism, Handcuffs was conceived as a missal" p. 166. This statement is interesting and probably correct but may not take the nature of "trilogy" fully into account.

Baptism, or purification by washing away sins, is generally "accompanied by namegiving".[34] Name-giving is a polite euphemism for the kinds of epithets that are volleyed about in Sticks and Stones.[35] The Donnellys are called "Blackfoot" or "Blackleg" by their enemies; however, the Donnellys themselves are not above giving few unkind, although descriptive, nicknames. Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ryan are referred to as "the Fats". Mrs. Donnelly disdainfully tells Will, "Uh, it's his tattletale mother is a fat woman has to be raised in and out and onto her bed with a pulley."[36] Andrew Keefe refers to his enemies as "Blackmouth Proddies".[37] Even the chorus as a group gets in the act. Sticks, who are Protestant sympathizers, cry out, "Hurrah for Holmes, ye bloody Papists."[38] But name calling has both a positive as well as a negative side.

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[34] James Noonan claims, "One of the patterns on which Part One of the trilogy is built are [sic] the Christian sacraments of initiation, Baptism, and Confirmation" James Reaney, The Donnellys, Part 1, Sticks and Stones, p. 162.

[35] Everyone is probably familiar with the Proverb: "Sticks and Stones may break my bones But names will never hurt me." mentioned in Sticks and Stones, p. 77.

[36] Sticks and Stones, p. 45.

[37] Ibid., p. 56.

[38] Sticks and Stones, p. 57.

When parents name children and when honorariams (or their opposite--nicknames) are given, careful attention is given to the choice of name with the intention of (in most cases) endowing a certain dignity upon the bearer of the name. Mrs. Donnelly, aside from a couple of uncharacteristic lapses (particularly when she refers to the physical appearance of Mrs. Ryan as a means of implying the latter's greedy capacity for gobbling up the property of her neighbours) pays careful attention to the Christian names of people in the community.[39] For example, before Mrs. Donnelly breaks up the vicious attack aimed at Donegan, she faces Donegan's sister, the widow of the man James Donnelly killed, and asks her forgiveness, beginning with:

> Sarah Farl. I cannot help calling you that although your name is Sarah Flannery. And I once a very long time ago knew you as Sarah Donegan. (Kneels)[40]

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[39] Using the image of fat to symbolize greed seems to be a lapse on the part of the playwright as well because the cruelty of the comment reflects very badly on Mrs. Donnelly and less on the capitalistic tendencies of the Ryans.

[40] Sarah, in turn, refers to Mrs. Donnelly as the former, Judith Magee. Mrs. Donnelly may have truly been known as Judith in Lucan during her lifetime but the fact that Sarah uses "Judith" and not "Johanna" here may be a reference to the meaning of the name, Judith, which is, "Praised. A woman commended for her patience and womanliness." Johanna is the feminine form of John which means "God is gracious."

Mrs. Donnelly's repetition of Sarah's name, her concentration upon identifying Sarah by and with her proper Christian appellation is an act of self-conscious reverence. In a sense, Sarah Farl baptizes Johanna Donnelly by washing away (forgiving) the sin committed against her (Sarah) by James Donnelly.[41]

Mrs. Donnelly's Baptism is equalled and opposed by the "black baptism" performed by the chorus, the men and women who peer into the barrel which holds Donegan and who do nothing to stop the cruelty of his tormentors; some even "join in".[42] In a sense, the tormentors are the agents who perform a black baptism first on poor Donegan and later on the Donnellys themselves.

Finally, in Sticks and Stones the chorus produces the ultimate in name calling when it portrays the ignorant and corrupt people in Biddulph community. There people (aptly illustrated and parodied by the Medicine Showman, Mr. Murphy) christen the Donnellys, "the Black Donnellys." "Black" represents both the crimes the Donnellys are said to have committed as well as "blackleg" or "blackfoot" which are epithets that indicate their philosophical and political leanings. According to the legend of the Black

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[41] Sticks and Stones, p. 131.

[42] The chorus kneels after this act of cruelty.

Donnellys, long after their murder, children in the area of the Roman Line, no doubt feeding on the Irish old country tendency toward superstition, claimed to see the ghosts of the Donnellys wandering on the road. In Thomas Kelley's book, The Black Donnellys, he says:

> So hurry to your home, good folks
> Lock doors and windows tight
> And pray for dawn, the Black Donnellys
> Will be abroad tonight.[43]

Reaney has the Showman repeat verses of Kelley's Ballad[44] and then gives the true Donnellys a chance to argue with the false Donnellys. The true Donnellys are able to point out errors in the legend and at last are able to undo some of the mischief caused by a community that christened them "black".

Baptism denotes purification by water. Knowledge of the connotations of baptism as an initiation ceremony, by blood or by fire as well as by water, is probably widespread among most persons who see this play. The Donnellys come into contact with the three elements used to baptize (initiate)--water, fire, and blood--when they determinedly go about the business of establishing themselves in their new community. James Donnelly spills the blood of Patrick Farl and although he pays his debt as stipulated by the courts by serving a seven-year prison sentence, the community seeks its own perverted brand of justice through acts of vengeance. A major tool of community-revenge, after name calling and clubbing, is the misuse of one of the four medieval elements, fire. Admittedly, fire references and fire imagery run throughout the trilogy but in Sticks and Stones these references occur frequently and appear to be a major motif established by the mock burning in the first scene. At one point, the chorus reports excitedly, "Your barn's on fire, Donnelly."[45] This observation is an ironic comment considering that it emanates from the actors who also start the blaze. What is important to note, however, is that the final fire image, the fire that kills the Donnellys, infects the new community with corruption. On the one hand, Mrs. Donnelly seeks penance and is purified (baptized) first by Sarah Farl and then (because of her innocence) when she dies in the fire.[46] In contrast, the blood on the hands of the community (its guilt, when it fails as a group to save Donegan) figuratively turns into the black water of a black and tainted baptism.[47]

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[43] Thomas Kelley, The Black Donnellys (Toronto: Modern Canadian Library, Pagurian Press, 1974), introduction.

[44] Kelley does not indicate the origin of the "Old Song".

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[45] Sticks and Stones, p. 146

[46] Whether or not Mrs. Donnelly dies in a state of grace (see p. 49, Sticks and Stones) is a matter for argument.

After a member of the Christian Church is baptized and purified, that person has another chance to reaffirm "the faith" in a ceremony called Confirmation. Two things are confirmed in The St. Nicholas Hotel: the Donnellys will stay in Biddulph despite all attempts to chase them out; the community holds fast to its conviction that the Donnellys are bad and, by any means, must be wiped off the community slate. In The St. Nicholas Hotel, the young boys of the previous play have become young men and long-time residents of Biddulph. The audience no longer has the feeling that the Donnellys are initiates. The young Will of Sticks and Stones was an idealist. Will in St. Nicholas Hotel, although a passionate man, has become very pragmatic. Will cautions young Tom Ryan not to buy anything from Mr. Stub. Tom has purchased a bridle from Stub's store and Mike and Will debate whether or not they should return the bridle immediately. The following conversation reveals Will's resignation:

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[47] Although Jennie speaks of Will's Confirmation in the Forest (p. 54, Sticks and Stones) and of learning the catechism for confirmation (p. 143, Sticks and Stones), name-calling is of greater importance in the first play than is confirmation. Sticks and Stones does involve learning the catechism of Biddulph but the study of the catechism is only proper in the Roman Catholic church after the rite of Baptism. Christening images appear to be very strong in Sticks and Stones although the idea that the Donnellys are learning their catechism that is, the ways of the community, is undeniably present as well.

> Will: For a penny I would. That was a foolish thing to do Tom. Don't you know who our enemies are yet?........
>
> Tom: Why was it a mistake?
>
> Mike: Because we never buy anything from Mr. Stub and as you charged the bridle that means he'll be after us for a debt.[48]

Mike and Will's weary resignation to a bad situation seems all the more confirmed when set off by Tom Ryan's innocence and good intentions. Like Will and Mike, other members of the community have also grown older and more set in their prejudices. Hatred of the Donnellys has infected the good infected the good nature of many of the townspeople. People seem meddling and generally unpleasant. Miss Maguire is cynical, Pat Marksey is hot-tempered; Mary Donovan has a simple-minded fixation for cows. In short, the people of the community are not likeable and they do not care that they are not. Every aspect of The St.

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[48] St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 43.

Nicholas Hotel, the weariness of Will and Mike, the unpleasantness of the inhabitants indicates that long-standing attitudes have become hardened and set. All of these attitudes, once confirmed, remain fixed like the stain on the floor that the scrubwoman is unable to brush away. In the last act of Sticks and Stones, Jennie tells the audience:

> We were going to be tested for confirmation in a church called - Biddulph. Most of the people liked us at the time. That doesn't matter though. Those with power did not. Our confirmation came up and although we had known our catechism well, we failed.[49]

While it is true that Jennie and her family fail to pass the test for their secular confirmation in the church of Biddulph, it is also true that they do know and easily answer all the questions of the sacred catechism. It is in The St. Nicholas Hotel that we find Mrs. Donnelly confirming her faith in the ultimate transcendence of her family. She speaks, understandably with some bitterness, but also with unmitigated resolution when she says:

> ...I told him what I tell you now--to look straight ahead past this stupid life and death they've fastened on you--just as long ago your father and me and our firstborn walked up over the

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[49] Sticks and Stones, p. 143.

> last hill in Ireland and saw, what you
> will see now--for the first time in our
> lives we saw freedom, we saw the sea.[50]

Mrs. Donnelly's reference to and re-iteration of the original dream of her and her husband, confirms their belief that, despite all the ensuing horrors of life in Biddulph, the dream was/is a good one. Mrs. Donnelly's references to "freedom" and to "sea" also confirm the archetypist's vision of re-birth. Thus, Confirmation, which is essentially that second chance to re-confirm one's faith, is very much the tone of Part II of the trilogy.

In Part III, Handcuffs, the language and imagery indicate that all of the community has undergone a spiritual alteration. In the Roman Catholic Church, the taking of Holy Orders, or ordination, is the ceremony which welcomes an individual into the brotherhood of Priests. The fraternal duality (Cain and Abel) of the term, brotherhood, is consistent with the pure and the tainted interpretation which is given, in Parts I and II, to Baptism and Confirmation. All three ceremonies may pay respect to the domain of good or the domain of evil. In the community of Biddulph two brotherhoods or orders exist:

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[50] The St. Nicholas Hotel, p. 152. There is a lot of "seeing" and "sawing" in this passage; such repetition may present an actress with a difficult task in trying to do justice to what is intended to be a moving speech.

one is holy, the other is diabolic. The Donnellys who are sent by the angels into paradise, join a holy fraternity. Their spirits, having the capacity of Lazarus, will be able to remain as a presence in the community. The final mime of Part III attests to the romantic, rather than the strictly religious, idea that good is a more powerful force than evil. The message of the fable-parable warns satanic forces that their victories are only temporal. Thus, although the diabolic order, or "the vigilante boys, like heroes, from the dock will go,"[51] their victory is short. Having been led into temptation and given in to the dark side, their correct names (with the exception of James Carroll) cannot even be recorded in a drama which mythologizes their legend. Reaney, by using pseudonyms for the evil-doers, dramatically dismisses them from immortality. The tainted order of Biddulph is properly forgotten.

Reaney also allows the Donnellys to put the tainted order in its place. At the close of Handcuffs, a golden light sweeps the stage,"[52] as the remaining members of the Donnelly family remember, "Where there was once a house/home...". The golden (fire) image of the harvest is in marked contrast to the picture, a few sequences earlier, of the Donnellys restraining the O'Halloran horses in order to allow a train to run over the O'Halloran sleigh. A director may be tempted to have the Donnellys watch rather than hold back the horses (hesitating to make the Donnellys more vengeance-minded in death than Reaney has painted them in life). In any event, it appears that the Donnellys, as members of a holy order (definitely not of a saintly order), are able to extract rough justice from those who victimized them. In this capacity they have become an order of knights-at-arms who protect the community from any future evil acts that could be perpetrated by the O'Hallorans.[53] Both legend and myth suggest that most of the vigilantes die violently and before their time. The Donnellys, being archetypal rather than religious, never aspire to sainthood. Mrs. Donnelly is a protector; she guards the good in the community the way King Arthur and his order of knights guarded the good in Camelot.

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[51] Handcuffs, p. 156.

[52] Handcuffs, p. 157.

II. Style and Myth

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[53] Handcuffs, p. 158. Jennie says, "so that I may kiss the loving arm that never failed to throw protection around and provide for all of us in the darkest day of our need."

Before discussing why the style of the trilogy complements the myth-making that is Reaney's ultimate objective, I want to be careful to add a brief caution that any analysis should not minimize the importance to the playwright, of pure theatrics. Moreover, it ought to be recognized that drawing a definitive line, between theatre the way Reaney likes it, and theatre whose style is organically connected to theme, is more than difficult. Reaney likes "busy" theatre and has chosen a "busy" story to relate through drama. Although there are many aspects of the dramatic style of The Donnellys that deserve attention, two elements seem most pertinent in regard to myth-making. They are the fullness of the trilogy[54] and the persistent goodness of the Donnellys.[55] Again, as with structure, myth is here based upon two facets of the story. One part of the story of these Irish immigrants is concerned with the primordial forces of good and evil. Nevertheless, in The Donnellys, this archetypal part of the tale does not stand alone. The spirit of good, as represented by the Donnellys, is not only unquenched by evil, but also this same spirit points out evil and warns the community in the manner of parable-fable, against wickedness. Therefore, briefly--before the subject of myth can be seriously discussed--the philosophy of the playwright should be considered; and as much as his artistic principles, Reaney's dramatic intentions ought to be respected.

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[54] By "fullness", I mean music, dance mime and not the least, the sheer number of sequences in an act.

[55] See for example: Ray Fazakas and Orlo Miller for an account of some of the provocation the Donnellys gave their enemies.

It is all-important to note that when it comes to theatre, Reaney wants a circus atmosphere; he wants no less than a three-ring Barnum and Bailey extravaganza.[56] He wants Eskimo or African theatre! In a burst of exuberance Reaney once said:

> My ideal is an Eskimo solstice celebration I once read about in which in one big underground igloo the whole community gathered and put on their annual us-against-winter play; masks, chanting women all sitting on a bench, but swaying and miming; men being crows, animal marionettes entering by invisible means, and total audience enjoyment. That's a style I'd like to reach up to.[57]

And, after all that, Reaney wants movies too. He believes that the narrative quality of the chorus is taken over by the eye of the camera, which, by means of its selectivity in "deciding" what it records, tells a story.[58] Reaney compares film and drama in the following way:

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[56] James Reaney, "A Letter from James Reaney", p. 2.

[57] Stage Voices, p. 156.

> Now, in a movie or at least the kind of movie I'm interested in, the spoken lines quoted above would disappear as would most of the choral commentary as well as the props and pieces of string. In the play [scenic variety] is implied in the choral passages plus the cats' cradles. The movement from simplicity to complexity in both drama and would-be film is the same and as agile. As a sidelight, it is of interest that string figures have been called the African and Eskimo cinema.[59]

There is no doubt that Reaney moves from simplicity (the plotline and set) to complexity (structure and style) in The Donnellys. Because Reaney wants theatre to be as full of action as a three-ring circus, because the kind of play or movie that interests him is the one where the story is told by a series of pictures and personified objects, as well as words,[60] one must pick up James Smith's suggestion that comparisons are only good when they are made within the genre. In other words, it is impossible to determine the full extent of Reaney's intentions (the organic connection between flat characters and circus atmosphere with myth-making) until the style of The Donnellys is put into context.[61]

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[58] In comparing film and chorus as narrators, Reaney adopts the same position as Bertolt Brecht. See Brecht's article on epic theatre, "Theatre for Learning" (q.v.).

[59] James Reaney, "Your Plays are Like Movies - Cinemascope Ones", Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien, V, No. 1-2, Spring 1979, p. 37.

[60] Although animals are not personified in The Donnellys (at one point actors become Mary Donovan's cows but the actors are miming cows rather than making them human-like) inanimate objects do appear to come to life,

The type of play that will help facilitate a proper adjudication of the "busy" quality of Reaney's trilogy should be the kind which share a stylistic rather than a structural resemblance to The Donnellys. Thus, while it is pertinent to note the similarity in structure between Aeschylus', The Oresteia, and The Donnellys, their vastly different styles do not assist in an evaluation of the trilogy's dramatic presentation.

Since Reaney's purpose in re-telling the Donnelly legend demands a narrator (chorus) in order to ensure that his plays will encompass all the details which he feels are important, the story-telling aspect of the trilogy needs to be complemented by the dramatic style of the play. Story-

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for example: sticks, stones, tops, handcuffs.

[61] For example, there is no point in criticizing Johanna, Jim or Will Donnelly for not being as psychologically complex as Hamlet or Clytemnestra if it can be shown that the former fall into their own tradition of tragic figures.

telling provides one clue. For comparative purposes, there are at least two dramatic styles which commonly "assist" structure in the telling of a story.[62] They are the melodramatic and (well-known in Canada) the docudramatic. In many respects, the melodramatic and the docudramatic styles have much in common. Considering that the docudrama (a term derived from the result of combining documentary film technique with dramatic form[63]) is a recent style and the melodrama is an ancient one, the statement that the two have traits "much in common" may seem odd. However, when one understands that both melodrama and docudrama are firmly rooted in sociology[64] rather than psychology, one begins to appreciate some truth in the cliche, "everything old is new again".

A drama which is rooted in sociology rather than psychology will tell the story of a community rather than the story of an individual. Because the stress is not on the individual, the question of whether or not the protagonist has a tragic flaw is not as important as whether or not there is a tragic flaw in the community as a whole. In both melodrama and docudrama the characters, being "stable", "flat", or "whole", have a consciousness which is not divided. Nor are these heroes presented in a manner which is psychologically authentic. Without the sin (or flaw) of pride, greed or envy, the pure protagonists never seem to bring about their own downfall. In a psychological drama, tragic suffering to some extent appears to be self-inflicted; in a sociological drama, melodramatic and docudramatic suffering appear to be, by the same token, a community-inflicted punishment which descends on the protagonist.

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[62] Epic theatre is also a theatre of story-telling but the stylistic considerations that are of concern here are not necessary attributes of epic style. For example, Brecht's epic protagonists are not usually flat characters.

[63] For an excellent description of how and why documentary became applicable to drama see Seth Feldman, "Documentary Performance", Canadian Drama, V, No. 2, Spring 1979, p. 11-24.

[64] Feldman points out that the camera only records the surface, not the heart, of the people it photographs.

Reaney's vision, because it concerns the community instead of the individual, is better served by melodramatic or docudramatic (psychologically undivided) than tragic protagonists. In melodrama and docudrama, the audience does not waste its energy trying to ascertain why or how the victim is to be blamed for the tragedy that has happened to him or her. If an individual in docudrama were the cause of his own distress, then the focus would shift away from the community at large and the community lesson or instruction, inherent in the parable or fable myth, would be lost or substantially reduced. For example, instead of noticing in The Donnellys the way in which the mob can be stimulated to perform evil acts, an audience (perceiving flaws in Donnelly family-members) might consider that the action of the mob is partly justified. The mob action must never be justified. The polarity of the sticks and stones, the condemnation of "too political" institutions, the sweeping madness of Carroll's vengeance, all would be reduced if Johanna, Jim, Will or Jennie were anything less than the epitome of good, fair-minded citizenry.

In other words, the complexity of the characters in The Donnellys never supercedes the complexity of their story. One purpose of docudrama, insofar as a Canadian audience is concerned, is to keep the emphasis of the drama on the story rather than on the characters. Whether the focus is tragic or comic, plays like Theatre Passe Muraille's The Farm Show; Rick Salutin's, Les Canadiens; and John Gray's, Billy Bishop Goes to War[65] tell little about William Lyon MacKenzie, Howie Morenz and Billy Bishop as individuals. The theme and context of these plays, favour the relating of their stories instead. For example, it may be argued that in "real life" Billy Bishop was not the straightforward, simple soul that he appears to be in Gray's play. However, when seen in the tradition of melodrama and docudrama, the undivided psychology of stage Billy, who narrates his own story with the help of music, props and various costumes, is a tremendous success. As the protagonist (hero) and narrator (chorus) rolled into one, stage Billy is hardly in a position to give an in-depth psychological portrayal of real Billy. In an manner similar to the Donnelly narrative, the story of Billy Bishop is more important to the community than the labyrinth of the man's mind. Therefore, by relying on documents (which Billy cites, just as the chorus in The Donnellys gives exhaustive lists of names and dates), Gray mythologizes the legend, from the humorous rather than the tragic, point-of-view. Docudrama, motivated in fashion after news documentaries and the "public's right to know the story", has either borrowed or unwittingly incorporated melodrama's psychologically undivided protagonist (the victim who either overcomes or falls prey to outside forces) in order to keep the focus on the story.

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[65] These are only three of many examples of so-called docudrama.

Because docudrama stresses the telling of the tale, devices such as music, props, costumes, fast-action and scene shifts, are employed by the playwright in aid of the narration. Although melodramatic style has changed over the centuries, in its original form the purpose of European melodrama of the middle-ages was not unlike the purpose of Canadian docudrama. In the mid-seventeenth century, melodrama was popular in England, Germany and France. The first melodrama in England was distinguished only by "the use of music, first to separate various incidents and then to underline them."[66] (This function has been discussed in regard to The St. Nicholas Hotel). It appears that the gothic and sentimental elements now associated with the word were added as time went by.[67] Be that as it may, the most interesting description of early melodrama for the purposes of this analysis, presents melodrama as if the latter were inspired by a circus or "an Eskimo solstice celebration." The music, the puppets, the mime, the fairy tales and history that characterize old French melodrama are some of the ingredients found in Canadian docudrama. As James Smith points out:

> ...Rousseau's melodrame had been swallowed whole by that voracious python the Boulevard du Temple, where since 1670 fit-up booths had enter-

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[66] The Oxford Companion to Theatre, p. 347.

[67] See for example, David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 1-21 and Robert Bechtold Heilman's "Tragedy and Melodrama: speculations on generic form" in The Texas Quarterly, III (Summer, 1960), 36-50.

> tained the Parisian mob with tumblers, jugglers, stilt-walkers, rope-dancers, puppeteers, magicians, infant prodigies, freaks and animals harlequinade, fairy-tales adapted from Perrault and spectacular musical pantomimes on mythical, historic or contemporary themes, performed in dumb-show with explanatory picards to aid the understanding.[68]

Whether or not French melodrama and Canadian docudrama are motivated by anything more compatible than a singleminded desire to entertain is a matter for research. What appears to be true, however, is that both genres (early melodrama and docudrama) stress story, varied theatrics and leave psychological probings for the theatre of true tragedy. Like Canadian audiences who enjoy the music and the activity in docudrama, the "Parisian mob" was entertained by music, mime, puppeteers. In the process, both groups learn(ed) about their community through narratives on mythical or historical themes.

In order to mythologize the legend, Reaney appears to have leaned toward two styles which are very closely linked. He uses the documentarist's interest in purporting to be objective for the purpose of giving the legend the right tone, elsewhere called, "dramatic truth."

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[68] James Smith, pp. 2-3.

He uses the melodramatist's eye--quick to spot life's essential unfairness--to show how forces of evil have victimized the innocent. The result of combining the melodramatic and docudramatic styles of presentation produce three eventful, fast-paced tales. Although each part has its own style by virtue of the properties, music, and dialogue peculiar to it, overall, the attributes of docudrama and melodrama--the importance of story, the "busyness" of the productions, and the complete goodness and lack of psychological depth of the protagonists--are the characteristics of the trilogy.

4

Summary

I. Introduction

In this final brief chapter, some conclusions will be drawn about the way in which Reaney has used the dramatic form to turn the legend of the Black Donnellys into a myth. Both in design and presentation respectively, the structure and style of James Reaney's trilogy, The Donnellys, are consistent with the playwright's archetypal philosophy. Furthermore, Reaney is self-consciously creating a myth which takes a moral (parable) stance. The story of Biddulph contains an object lesson for colonial communities specifically, and all communities generally. Superficially, the lesson appears to be concerned with the painful triumph of good over evil; but, a closer examination of Reaney's protagonists reveals some interesting aspects of the archtypist's philosophy as it pertains to the age-old battle between passion and reason. As I pointed out in Chapter I, I am concerned that practical criticism should not ignore the artistic principles of the playwright. For this reason, Chapter 4 will conclude with a discussion of some of the archetypes that appear in the trilogy.

II. Structure and Style

For the purpose of telling such a large and detailed story, one of Reaney's first decisions was to choose for his plays some type of episodic structuring which could incorporate the vastness of the subject into dramatic form. The episodes work in two ways. Sticks and Stones may be seen as episode one of the trilogy. Acts I, II and III of Sticks and Stones, on the other hand, may be called a series of smaller episodes which constitutes the first play. The past-present time shifts, plus the constant presence of catastrophe, relate the episodes one to the other both within the plays themselves and in the trilogy as a whole. Because the episodes are repetitive and relate to each other, I have called them gyroscopic (q.v.). The gyroscopic structure of The Donnellys, with its circles within circles, attests to Reaney's philosophical belief that events in time constantly change and turn in a spiralling motion. As Reaney tells Geraldine Anthony, "I realized that watching a tragedy was like seeing this wheel slowly make an unusual but usual turn--rather like cat's [sic] cradles that gradually turn inside out."[1] In fact, a linear or a cause-effect plot development would not structurally (organically) serve Reaney's idea of "spiralling" time. In order to re-tell the established version of the Donnellys (established primarily by Thomas Kelley) as well as to tell the story anew--according to the Reaney version of events--Reaney consciously uses the epic structure and the chorus-narrator as story-telling and dramatic devices.

The chorus not only recites facts and lists, not only assumes many parts, but also reflects the temper of the Biddulph community which it represents (rather than joining in an all-knowing conspiracy with the audience). In addition, each member of the chorus is never what he or she seems to be. The actor who plays Andrew Keefe in one scene, may be George Stub in another. Furthermore, the actors are conscious of being only actors instead of real people, and are at pains to let the audience know their limitations. We recall Mr. Donnelly saying, "I'm not in Hell for I'm in a play."[2] The fact that the chorus is never what it appears to be is another deliberate and skillful ramification of Reaney's tragic vision, a vision which claims that the events of tragedy are an ever-turning wheel. The chorus alters itself in order to tell the story (the wheel forward rotates), and the audience is aware that people and events in the Donnellys' lives change. Nonetheless, the wheel has its own property of roundness and is fixed on a definite course. The chorus aptly illustrates the immutability of archetypes when it mimes the wheatfield in Handcuffs. Reaney's manipulation of the structure accomplishes two objectives. He is able to show the impermanence of temporal conditions (the life of an individual) at the same time as he re-inforces the archetypal concept of the continuation of the race (birth, life, death and re-birth).

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[1] Stage Voices, p. 148.

[2] Sticks and Stones, p. 49.

Just as Reaney gives the impression that he is making deliberate choices regarding structure, he is as fully cognizant regarding the function of style. The ballad, the schottische, as well as all the props, contribute to the archetypal concept of a circular life-death pattern. When Reaney writes that portions of the ballad of "John Barleycorn" are repeated in Sticks and Stones, or when the chorus frequently spins a top across the stage in the St. Nicholas Hotel, or when the dancers twirl around while doing the reel or schottische in Handcuffs, the playwright is creating a variety of leitmotifs which both unify the structure and emphasize its cyclicality.

In order to show that the wheel of tragedy is on a fixed path, Reaney undercuts the events of the structure with the knowledge that no matter which direction events appear to turn, the catastrophe is inevitable. Similarly, the tops, sticks, stones, dances, handcuffs, with their tremendously varied presentation, are shown to be part of an unchangeable pattern simply because the goodness of the Donnellys can never be questioned. Consequently, what the catastrophe does for the structure, the goodness (the piety, innocence and virtue) of the Donnellys does the same for the style. "Catastrophe" and "goodness" pin the wheel of events to a fixed orbit.[3] Because of Reaney's effective, intelligent and deliberate use of structure and style, the audience--sometimes bewildered by a full and active stage--may be assured of two conditions at least. The Donnellys will die (a matter of structure); the Donnellys are heroic (a matter of style).

Although partially explained by the tradition of the melodramatic and docudramatic styles, and although partially justified by Reaney's own research which determined that the Donnellys truly were more sinned against than sinning (therefore, their foibles, small in comparison to the crimes of the vigilantes, should be overlooked), the goodness of the stage-Donnellys remains a disturbing feature of the trilogy. In the following section, I hope to explain how and why Reaney, the self-conscious myth-maker, has created heroes who epitomize passion and irrationality. That Reaney has deliberately attended to a circular pattern in both the structure and the style of The Donnellys is a feature of the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3. Therefore, having established that Reaney is a self-conscious mythopeic writer, the question which must now be confronted concerns the implicit nature of the archetypes.

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[3] Again, the gyroscope presents a good concrete image of comparison.

III. Conscious Myth-Making

Mythologizing, according to Jean Piaget--a noted French research-psychologist who died in 1980--is an essential part of child-development. It may also be an essential part of community-development as well; for, as Piaget discovered, young children and primitive people share similar anthropomorphic conceptions about their environment. In his eulogy on Piaget, John Leo noted:

> Piaget found that toddlers think like
> primitive people. The very young

> believe that the moon follows them when they go for a walk, that dreams come in through the window at night, and that all moving things, including ocean waves and fluttering flags are obviously alive.[4]

Whether or not mytholigizing is part of a community's "collective unconscious" as Jung (and probably, Reaney) would maintain, or whether or not mythologizing is a phase which all communities, like children, have in common and must go through (a structure), it appears that every community of people seems to need its own mythology. The need is there because people require something in common, one with the other, in order to become bonded together as a group. No matter how sophisticated or how elegant they are, the myths of foreign communities cannot, for some reason, be supplanted to fulfill the needs of colonial communities. Consciously, with the needs of the community uppermost in his mind,[5] Reaney converted the legend of the Black Donnellys into the myth of the white Donnellys.

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[4] John Leo, "From Mollusks to Moppets", Time, October, 1980. For further explanation see Jean Piaget, The Child and Reality, trans. by Arnold Rosin (New York: Penguin Books, reprinted 1981) pp. 163-172.

[5] In an interview with Jean McKay, Reaney says, "[Gyroscope's] not related to worrying about community, or researching or anything..." This statement is a good indication of Reaney's concerns when he wrote The Donnellys. E.C.W. p. 138. He obviously intended Biddulph to be an example rather than an exception of the evils that can befall a community.

Because he was impressed by the basic unfairness of the treatment accorded to them by their own community group, because innocence put to death has to be the most horrific outcome of injustice, Reaney probably could not see Biddulph and its residents as anything more than evil. The legend is about one family of Irish immigrants who got caught up in a feud and were killed on account of it; the myth is an allegorical battle between would-be master and would-be slave; the parable-fable is a story of how good ultimately triumphs over evil when the proper balance of nature is re-asserted.

One of the reasons that the Donnelly legend invites mythologizing involves the very nature of their story. First of all, the Donnelly story is one of a journey or a quest for the ideal. The legend is about displaced persons who cope with their Irish-Celtic values in a nineteenth century, Southern Ontario environment. The settlers' ideas of what community is and what it ought to be has come with them on their journey as a kind of mental luggage, or, said in Platonic terms, for the settlers the "ideal" of community preceeds the fact. Realities of life in the new community unfortunately transplant the ideal because, as insidious as wisps from Pandora's box, the old hatreds permeate the settlement. When these old hatreds combine with the negative, some would say the evil, side of human nature, terrible violence occurs and five members of the Donnelly family are murdered. This journey, or quest for the ideal, is part of the archetypal vision of self-fulfillment.[6] Outwardly, of course, it looks as if the Donnellys have failed in their quest. At this point, the drama circles beyond and away from legend. According to Reaney, the myth-maker, the Donnellys complete their journey and ultimately find the ideal which they seek. Not only are their reputations totally redeemed by the playwright, but the Donnellys, now the white Donnellys, also represent an allegorical version of the good. But Johanna is not a female Christ-figure per se, even though her character is both victim and idealist. She has been created out of the mould of an ancient goddess; she is Demeter or Ceres who represents the harvest and fertility.[7]

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[6] Joseph Campbell, in the chapter, "Departure", Hero With a Thousand Faces, Bollingen series XVII (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, second edition 1968, third printing, 1973) p. 58, says: "This first stage of the mythological journey--which we have designated the 'call to adventure'--signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."

[7] Edith Hamilton describes the nature and function of Demeter in a manner which makes comparison of the goddess and Mrs. Donnelly very feasible. In Mythology (New American Library, Mentor Book: New York, copyright renewed, 1969), p. 47, Hamilton says:

> It was natural, too, that the divine

Demeter, for all her bounty, refused to give the earth a growing season when her daughter, Persephone, was in the underworld with Hades. Like her sub-conscious model, Johanna Donnelly seeks retribution from the vigilantes who tormented her family. After death, Johanna behaves more like the mythological goddess of the harvest than a female embodiment of the forgiveness of sins. At the end of Act III, Handcuffs, Johnny O'Connor tells his mother, Teresa, that:

> Country people say the old man and woman then disappeared and that it was revenge on O'Halloran who was the secret leader of the gang that killed them.[8]

While the vengeance of the Donnellys is worth noting in order to establish the classic rather than the Christian basis of the hero-archetype, Reaney's use of the female goddess as a force of good attests to the playwright's belief in a matriarchal mythology[9] with some Christian overtones.

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power which brought forth the grain should be thought of as a goddess, not a god. When the business of men was hunting and fighting, the care of the fields belonged to the women and they plowed and scattered the seed and reaped the harvest...

[8] Handcuffs, p. 153.

[9] In the mythologies of most indigenous

Reaney's deliberate attempt to alter the legend and mythologize the Donnellys, especially Johanna Donnelly, raises a problem. Immediately the reader-playgoer should be aware of a paradox. If, as critics are told by several literary theorists (as well as some psychologists and anthropologists), the archetypes of myth spring from the unconscious, is it a legitimate, even a possible goal, to consciously encourage a matriarchal (or patriarchal, for that matter) mythology for the purpose of satisfying a relatively "mythless" community?[10] It is certainly possible for a playwright to do psychological and literary research in order to determine exactly what the symbols of myth are. One supposes that only time will tell whether or not a consciously constructed myth will be accepted into the local mythological canon. However, what Reaney's myth-making actually does is to laud intuition and feelings.[11]

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communities, women have fared rather badly. It would be interesting to do a study of Canadian literature to see how often a positive female archetype occurs.

[10] Joseph Campbell in The Hero With a Thousand Faces, p. 4, says "...For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source."

[11] Wilbur Scott in his introduction to the

Reaney's tribute to the instinctive knowledge of humanity comes in the form of a highly rational and complex drama. Reaney's genius as a playwright depends greatly on his reasoning faculties. Remarkably, the Donnelly family in Reaney's trilogy do not reason. They are stubborn, idealistic, proud, and strong but they are not thinkers.

And in case there is any doubt about the basis of the Donnellys' decision-making in the trilogy, one can examine their lives step by step. They decide to leave Ireland to escape persecution (no economic reasons are given although land later does become important to them) armed with the idealistic notion that the new country of their children's birth, "a new country these Canadas,"[12] will not be a place of bullies and blowhards. Their naivete is nearly boundless. With complete faith in a handshake, Jim Donnelly does not register the land which he clears. Later, aroused to a fury because he is called "blackleg", and upset because he cannot claim his land, Jim

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Archetypal approach in Five Approaches of Literary Criticism (New York: Collier Books, 1962) p. 251, says: "But whether done well or ill, the totemic [archetypal] approach obviously reflects the contemporary dissatisfaction with the scientific concept of man as, at his highest, rational."

[12] Sticks and Stones, p. 44.

murders Patrick Farl. As the episodes progress, the audience becomes increasingly aware that the Donnellys do not plan their lives. When all sense and reason should tell them to get out of Biddulph and join their friend Andrew Keefe who has quit the community, the Donnellys stick to their ground--literally.

The people who do reason and plan are the villains of the trilogy. Vigilantes Jim Carroll and Tom Cassleigh plot and scheme and accomplish a massacre. Surveyors and politicians are either rigid enforcers of establishment rules or hypocritical handmaidens of the establishment. The "thinking" or political part of the church as an institution is represented as corrupt and decadent. Even the little villains, for example, the combination of Maguire and Stub who try to form some long-range plan for their lives, are caught up in mean, self-serving actions. Without exception, the evil-doers in the trilogy are the people who rely on their capacity for reason to determine their actions.

Reaney has consciously made a myth which has polemically divided passion and reason. Stylistically, justification can be found through an examination of the function of docudrama and melodrama, for his approach to this black-white characterization. And indeed, the archetypal patterns that Reaney uses--for example, the cyclicality of life and death, the expulsion of the scapegoat,[13] and the female protector--appear to be "genuine" and sociologically sound. Furthermore, Reaney's addition of Christian overtones, that is the forces of good and evil, to his archetypal models, gives the trilogy the air of a moral lesson. All is well until the moral lesson is finally uncovered. I stated earlier that Reaney's optimism in the face of catastrophe lies in the triumph of life over death. The Donnellys are symbols of the strength of the lifeforce and as symbols, they also represent the playwright's conception of good. Unfortunately, a community which exists on passion without reason would simply exemplify the height of capriciousness and instability. Nevertheless, the trilogy is totally consistent with Reaney's beliefs. Reaney's own philosophical committment to instinctive goodness forms the basis of his artistic principles.

In conclusion, the final word must be a re-iteration of my defense of practical criticism. My approach to The Donnellys through the analysis of style and structure attempts to reveal the literary complexity and dramatic power of a major Canadian work for the stage. That this leads to my identifying a passionate myth of community rather than a rational model for one does not diminish my appreciation of the remarkable dramaturgical experiment emerging from James Reaney's devotion to archetypal themes and Canadian myth-making.

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[13] See, for example, Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, for explanation of Tribal reliance on the ritual of "Scapegoating" or symbolically removing evil from the community.

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